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Vol. LXXV.

Freelance, the Buccaneer;

Or, The Waif of the Wave. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.



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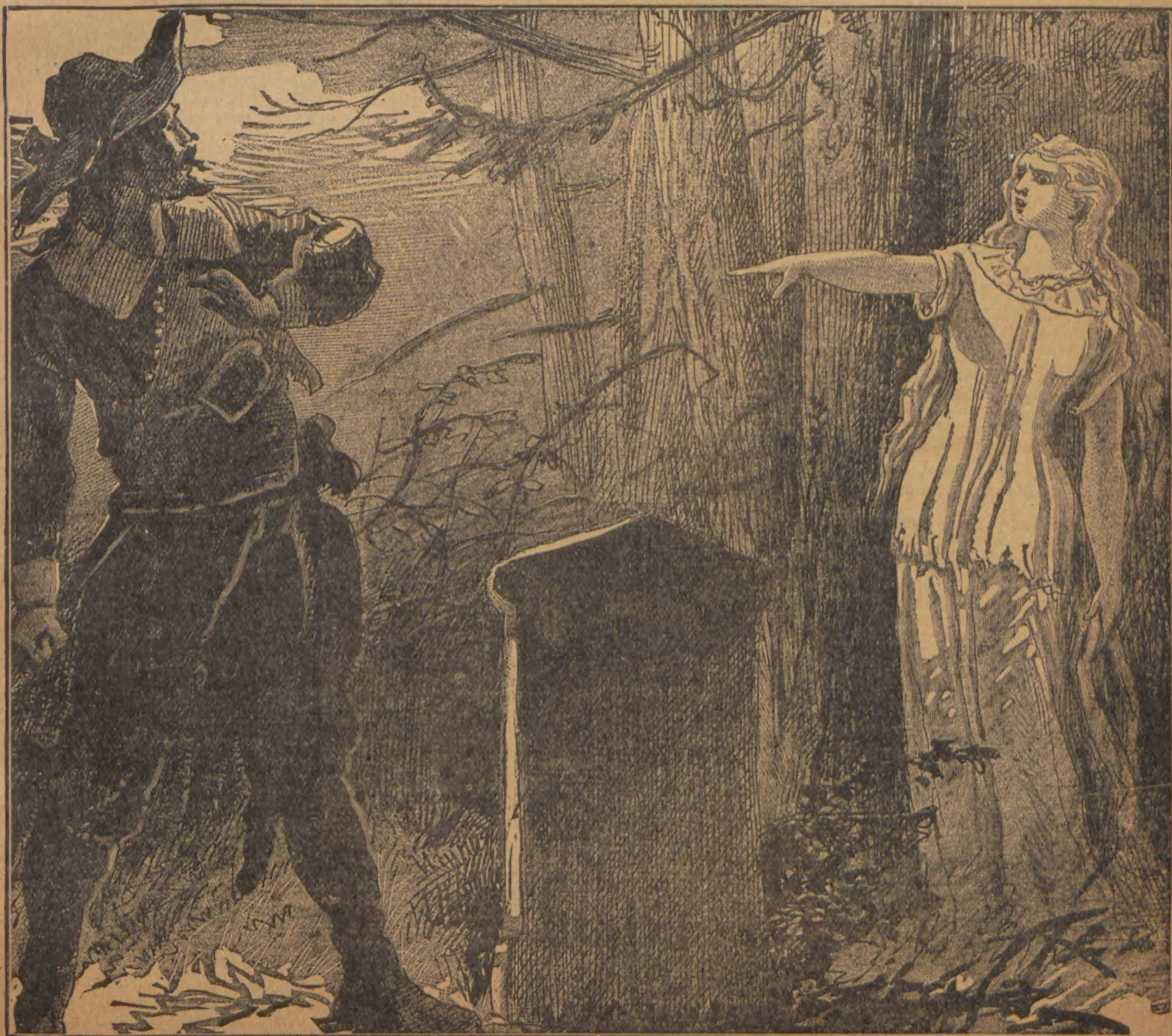
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Freelance, THE BUCCANEER; OR, THE WAIF OF THE WAVE.

A ROMANCE OF THE EARLY YEARS OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE CRETAN ROVER," "THE PL-
RATE PRINCE," "THE DARE DEVIL," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A GRAVE BETWEEN THEM.

LIKE a flood of silver light the moon's rays streamed down from a cloudless sky, and bathed land and sea in its halo of dreamy luster. The winds had died away, and the waves broke with muffled sound upon the pebbly beach, while in the background the dark line of forest echoed to the shrill notes of songsters—the mock-birds of the South, trilling forth their melody, as though in joyful admiration of the calm beauty of the scene.

Along the curving shores of the Gulf, here and there gleam from the magnolia forests, the snowy walls of a plantation villa, surrounded upon either side with spreading acres, tilled by the dark hands of the slave, whose white cottages are visible in the distance.

In front of these homesteads, the abodes of wealthy and aristocratic Southerners, lying at anchor upon the waters of the Gulf, are visible yachts of various sizes and rig, but with sails furled for the night, and no one visible upon their decks, for the world seems to have sunk to sleep under the calm influence of the hour.

Along the shore, and in front of the villas, winds a broad carriage drive, and in the distance appears a horseman, slowly riding along, the hoofs of his steed falling lightly upon the dusty road.

At length he halts in front of a massive gateway leading into the handsome grounds of a villa situated back from the road.

Peering through the foliage he beholds a light in one of the windows, and from his lips break the words:

"It is the signal! she will be there."

Quietly he enters the gate, closing it without a sound behind him, and then leaving the drive that approaches the house, he skirts the fence, and rides toward a distant clump of trees, through which patches of white glimmer in the moonlight.

Nearer and nearer he approaches the clump of trees, using his spurs to force his horse on, for the animal seems to dread some danger lurking in the dark covert, or, with the peculiar instinct of dumb brutes, dreading to approach the spot where the dead lay at rest.

Presently through the foliage a white fence was visible, surrounding the marble monuments erected over those who had sunk to sleep forever; but, apparently with no superstitious feeling regarding a cemetery, the horseman urged his horse forward, and springing to the ground threw the bridle-rein over a post.

As he did so the animal started with a loud snort, but a word from his master calmed him.

What had caused the sudden fright of the steed was certainly sufficient to cause human nature to become momentarily unnerved, for a form, clad in white, advanced from the shadow of a marble tomb directly toward the horseman, who nimbly sprang over the low fence and said earnestly:

"Lucille, my darling, you are a brave little girl to meet me here," and he drew the slender form toward him, and, bending over, imprinted a kiss upon the upturned face.

"It is not a cheerful place, Launcelot, for a lovers' tryst, yet I do not fear my dead ancestors, for I have never harmed them; but then I had an idea that our other rendezvous was known, and hence wrote you to come here."

"And I would have come anywhere to meet you, Lucille; but has anything arisen of late to arouse your suspicions?"

"Yes; my father seems to watch me, and yesterday forbade me to go, after nightfall, to the arbor on the cliff; but tell me, Launcelot, when will our meetings be no longer secret?"

"To-morrow, Lucille, I intend to seek your father and tell him of my love for you; he, as I before told you, knows who I am, though you do not, other than what I have told you regarding myself."

"And I have kept my promise and never made one inquiry regarding Mr. Launcelot Vertner, the handsome young gentleman who saved my life, and then stole my heart," said the maiden, playfully.

"You will find, Lucille, that I have deceived you in one thing only, but I did so with no dishonorable motives, I pledge you."

"Circumstances over which you and I had no control caused me to beg you to keep our meetings a secret for the present, and a fear of losing you perhaps made me err in this; but to-morrow you shall know all, for, having been North

at school, since you were a very little girl, the rumors of the neighborhood are unknown to you."

"I hate gossip, Launcelot, and frequently have to hush up old Mammy Chloe, who, like many other old negroes, likes to chat about the affairs of others; but to-morrow you will see papa?"

"Yes; and, Lucille, you will still love me, come what may?"

"Never can I love any one else, Launcelot; but you are sad; do you dread trouble?" and Lucille laid her hand gently upon the man's shoulder, while the moonlight, streaming down upon them, made a picture worthy the artist's brush.

The maiden was scarcely more than seventeen, with a Madonna-like face of wondrous beauty, and a tall, willowy form, perfectly molded.

She was dressed in white, and her embroidered skirt trailed upon the dew-gemmed grass, while a mossy worsted wrap encircled her shoulders, and half hid the masses of golden hair and haughty head.

The man was six feet in height, as straight as an arrow, full-chested, with broad shoulders, and a form that was not only elegant, but denoted great strength and activity.

He was dressed in a riding-suit, top-boots, and a gray slouch hat, the broad brim being turned up, permitting his face to be visible.

And it was a face that few could look upon and not admire—a face of beauty in every outline, blended with nobleness and calm dignity, a dignity that amounted almost to sternness, when the features were in repose.

The complexion was dark; the hair and long, drooping mustache black, and the eyes restless and full of fire.

Replying to the maiden's question, the man said, slowly:

"It seems almost too much happiness, Lucille, when I think that I may win you as my wife, and bitter obstacles are before us; but we will hope for the best. Now you must not remain longer out in the night air, and to-morrow our fate will be sealed."

"Devil incarnate! this night shall your fate be sealed."

The words rung out loud and stern on the night air, and a dark form bounded from the shadow of a tree and confronted the lovers, an upraised arm and knife in hand.

But, quick as was his spring, and taken by surprise as he was, the man thrust Lucille to one side, and a pistol gleamed in his hand, aimed directly at the heart of the assailant.

"Drop that knife, Colonel Darrington, or I will kill you!"

"For Heaven's sake do not fire, Launcelot; it is my father!" and the trembling maiden sprang between the two men.

Instantly her lover lowered his pistol, while he said, sadly:

"Forgive me, Lucille; for the moment I forgot that he was your father, and only looked upon him as the lifetime foe of my race."

"Ay, Launcelot Grenville, and from this moment your foe unto death."

"Now, in the presence of my daughter, there must be no scene; but to-morrow, sir, you shall hear from me, and the sun shall set upon one Darrington or Grenville less."

"Oh, Launcelot, are you a Grenville?" cried Lucille, half shrinking away.

"Yes, Lucille; I told you that there were bitter barriers between our love for each other—I am Launcelot Vertner Grenville," said the young man calmly.

"And you love this man, Lucille?" cried the father, turning toward his daughter.

"I do, father, with all my heart and soul."

"God bless you, Lucille; and, sir, I love your daughter—hold, and hear me—I love her with the honor of a true man, and I would ask you and her to let the dead past bury its dead, and the names of Darrington and Grenville become united."

"Never, sir, never!"

"Stay, Colonel Darrington, and remember that I am the one that is offering the right hand of fellowship to the man who killed my father."

The voice of Launcelot Grenville was deep and stern, but his manner was earnest, and there was no tremor in the hand he held forth to Ferd Darrington.

"By heaven, sir, you will dare me to strike you even here. Never will I consent that your blood and mine shall mingle in the veins of a human being. Only in hatred and the bitter struggle for life and death shall your blood mingle with mine."

"So be it, Ferd Darrington. You have spoken, and the grave now yawns between us—a grave I was willing to step across with extended hand."

"And I hurl back that proffered hand with hatred and contempt."

"Father, this gentleman saved my life, for he it was who saved me the day I was kidnapped by the coast pirates; he it was who attacked them single-handed, killed two of their number and rescued me."

"Great God! is this true, Lucille?" and the

strong man staggered back as though dizzy with overwhelming emotion.

"It is true, father; I told you that a horseman passing, and doubtless a traveler, came to my aid, and I told you the truth, for only days after, when out riding, did I meet him, and from that time on we met often, until I learned to love him with all the devotion of my heart."

"And, Colonel Darrington, fearing that Lucille would turn from me in horror, knowing me as Lance Grenville, I gave her part of my name, that of Launcelot Vertner, and it was my intention to-morrow to seek you and ask that the past might be forgotten."

"And again I say—never!"

"Father, I love him, and he loves me; he has as much, if not more, as I remember the history of the fearful vendetta between our families, to forgive than you and I, so listen to our appeal, father, and let the past be buried forever."

The maiden's voice was plaintive and appealing, and approaching her father she rested a hand upon either shoulder, and looked beseechingly into his white, stern face.

But the devil of his nature had complete ascendancy, and in hoarse, cutting tones, he said:

"I swear it! Your life, or mine, Lance Grenville!"

"Come, Lucille."

The maiden quickly sprang from him to the side of her lover and throwing her arms around his neck, she cried passionately:

"Oh, Launcelot! Launcelot! This is the end of my happy dream of love! Farewell! forever, forever!"

Drawing her quickly toward him he pressed a kiss upon her cold lips, and turning away sprang into his saddle, and dashed swiftly from the scene, urging his splendid horse, by a mighty leap, over the picket fence that surrounded the handsome grounds of the Darrington villa, and flying down the road at a mad pace that proved how his noble heart was torn with grief and despair.

CHAPTER II.

THE DUEL-VENDETTA.

COLONEL FERD DARRINGTON, a stern, haughty man of forty, and the last male survivor of his race, sat on the broad piazza of his elegant house, the morning after the scene at the burying-ground of his family.

His brow was dark and clouded, his lips firm set, and his eyes gazing out upon the waters of the Gulf with that fixed stare, which proves the thoughts are far away.

Presently the rumble of wheels awoke him from his reverie, and glancing up he beheld what, in his time, he had never seen before—the well-known carriage of the Grenvilles, coming up to the door of his home.

Instantly he was upon his feet, his face livid, when from the vehicle sprang a young man, clad in the attire of an officer in the United States Navy.

Both men knew each other well by sight, but never before had a word passed between them.

Ascending the steps, the young officer said, coldly, though bowing with politeness:

"Colonel Darrington, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, and I address Lieutenant Arthur Grenville?"

"You do, sir, and I have called to ask, Colonel Darrington, if you intended it as a personal insult to me when you named, in your affair with my brother, Mr. Rosal Abercrombie as your second—a person whom I certainly do not look upon as a gentleman, and will hold no communication with."

"You can take it as you choose, Lieutenant Grenville, and, after my meeting with your brother, I am perfectly willing to hold myself answerable to you," was the quiet reply of Ferd Darrington.

"It is my desire, sir, that your meeting with me be prior to that with my brother, and, as I decline to act with the second you have named, we can arrange the time and place for ourselves personally."

"Ah, I see your drift, sir. You wish, if possible, by killing me, to prevent a meeting between myself and Mr. Lance Grenville," said Colonel Darrington, with a sneer.

"You guess aright, sir. Knowing the immediate cause of quarrel between you and my brother, I fear that he will not attempt your life, and that you, in your merciless nature, should spare him, I have no idea, so I desire to place the meeting on a more equal footing, by being the first to face you."

"I will willingly oblige you, lieutenant, after I have met your brother, but peremptorily decline doing so before, and as you object to Mr. Abercrombie, and I wish to place no obstacle in the way of my hostile meeting with Mr. Lance Grenville, I will refer you to Mr. Van Loo as my second."

Arthur Grenville bowed, and, with a look of disappointment upon his face, entered his carriage and drove away.

As the vehicle drew up for the footman to open the gate, a slender form suddenly sprang to the window, and Arthur Grenville beheld one of the most beautiful faces he had ever looked upon.

It was now white, the eyes were red with

weeping, and the traces of deep sorrow rested upon every feature, and still the face was exquisitely lovely.

"Ah, sir, beg Launcelot Grenville not to kill my father!"

The words and voice were pleading, and Arthur Grenville seemed moved with pity, while he answered sadly:

"Alas, Miss Darrington, I fear that it will be the other way; but I will do all in my power, for your sake and my brother's, to prevent a fatal termination."

"God bless you," and stepping back Lucille allowed the carriage to go on, while she retraced her way to the mansion, keeping a hedge between herself and the eye of her father, who still paced the piazza.

Having objected to the young man named as Colonel Darrington's first second, on account of his wild and dissolute character, Arthur Grenville could find no fault with Paul Van Loo, a wealthy young planter, and a friend of both himself and brother, and he accordingly sought him out and a meeting was arranged for sunrise the following morning, at a lonely grove upon a point that jutted out into the Gulf.

Before the sun arose on the following day, the Grenville carriage, with its negro coachman and footman in livery, rolled along rapidly to the field, where, ten years before, the father of Lance and Arthur had fallen by the hand of Ferd Darrington, and where, for three generations the Darringtons and Grenvilles had faced each other in the deadly vendetta, and always with fatality to one name or the other.

It was a bitter feud, that had begun half a century before, when a Grenville had been the successful rival of a Darrington for the hand of a beauty and heiress, and had eventually ended in bloodshed, the mantle of hate descending like an heirloom from father to son, until at last two of the name had met and loved each other.

So impatient was Ferd Darrington to meet the man who had dared to love his daughter, that the brothers found him and his second already upon the field, they having come there upon horseback, accompanied by a negro servant who bore the deadly weapons to be used in the affray.

Bowing coldly to each other as they met, the two seconds then walked one side, while Colonel Darrington impatiently paced to and fro, an evil glitter in his eye, and Lance Grenville leaned against a tree, his arms folded, his face pale, but emotionless, and his eyes gazing afar off upon the gulf, as though striving to look into the great beyond and behold the fate in store for him.

How he would have shrunk in horror from that future, had he read in those blue waters the destiny that awaited him.

"Colonel Darrington, Lieutenant Grenville informs me that his brother was the one who rescued your daughter from the coast pirates, some months ago; are you aware of that fact?" and Paul Van Loo turned to his principal.

"I am, sir, and I am surprised that Mr. Grenville should endeavor to shun this meeting by hedging himself behind a favor rendered to me and mine," was the haughty retort.

"You mistake, sir; Mr. Grenville is represented by his brother, who, in the hope of ending this affair without a fatal termination, told me of the circumstance which none of us in the neighborhood before suspected, and, believing that, if known to you that you owed to Mr. Lance Grenville the life, and perhaps more, of your daughter, this present difficulty might be averted, I spoke as I did."

"I thank you, Van Loo, for your good intentions, but nothing that Mr. Grenville has ever done, or could do, will mitigate in the slightest degree, my hatred for himself and name, and you will oblige me by immediately making arrangements for the duel."

Paul Van Loo seemed surprised, and drawing a sword from its scabbard tested its temper, while Arthur Grenville walked toward his brother, who had not seemed to hear the effort made at a reconciliation between himself and his enemy.

A few moments more, and throwing aside their coats the two men stood facing each other, swords in hand, for, as the challenged party, Lance Grenville had chosen those weapons, and his motive for doing so was soon evident, for, a superb master in fence, he had determined to disarm his antagonist and give him his life.

A few passes, and the blade of Colonel Darrington was twisted from his hand; but, without following up his advantage, Lance Grenville lowered the point of his weapon, and said, calmly:

"For the sake of Lucille, sir, I will give you your life."

"My life I will not accept at your hands, sir, and as you have proven my master with the sword, the pistol will place us upon a more equal footing," and Ferd Darrington was white with rage, and seeing that he was determined, Paul Van Loo had no alternative but to take from their velvet case the long dueling pistols his principal had insisted upon bringing along.

With a bow, Lance Grenville signified his acceptance of the weapons and a second meeting,

and soon the two splendid-looking men again faced each other at ten paces apart.

"Here, Lance, and for God's sake, do not let that man kill you," and Arthur Grenville placed the loaded pistol in his brother's hand.

Lance Grenville made no reply, but a grim smile crossed his face, and he stood like a statue awaiting the word.

"It soon came, given by Paul Van Loo:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

Both men bowed.

"Fire! One!"

With the word one, the pistol of Ferd Darrington exploded, and a dull thud was heard, while Lance Grenville started slightly, and moved one step backward; but, instantly, he recovered himself, and suddenly raising his pistol fired above his head at a red-bird—in hue a fit songster for that scene—that sat singing in a tree above the heads of the two men.

Instantly the red-bird fell from his perch, his head severed by the bullet from Lance Grenville's pistol—a splendid specimen of marksmanship.

Paul Van Loo sprung to the side of Colonel Darrington, crying:

"Colonel, you saw his shot? He has twice saved your life, and I beg now that this affair end here."

The white lips of Ferd Darrington parted, and the words were hissed out:

"I demand another fire! Load those pistols again, Van Loo."

"It rests with Mr. Grenville, whether he will meet you again," said Paul Van Loo, evidently hurt at the determined hate of his principal.

"My brother has twice risked his life, and twice spared that of Colonel Darrington. I will not consent to another fire," said Lieutenant Grenville, hotly.

"Then I shall hold him responsible whenever and wherever I meet him, after leaving this field," came the quick retort.

"Arthur, if it has to come to chance encounter to settle this affair, let it end here. I will exchange shots again with Colonel Darrington," said Lance, and his lips slightly quivered, as though with some inward emotion that was choking him.

Again the two men faced each other, and once more the word was given to fire, and both pistols were discharged together.

As the smoke drifted away, Colonel Darrington was discovered lying his full length upon the ground, while Lance Grenville stood with folded arms, glancing down upon him, and with an expression of intense sorrow in his face.

"I have killed him, Arth, and Lucille will now curse me."

There was a depth of feeling in the words that proved how terribly the strong man suffered, and Arthur Grenville made no reply.

"Yes, he is dead. But, Grenville, you acted most nobly; are you not hurt?" and Paul Van Loo arose from the side of the dead man and approached Lance Grenville.

"At the first fire his bullet struck here—see! This turned its course from my heart, and it gave me a mere flesh wound," and he took from his breast-pocket a miniature set in a heavy gold case.

But the glass was shattered to atoms, the gold indented, and the face that had been painted thereon was deeply marred by the bullet, and yet both Paul Van Loo and Arthur Grenville saw that it was the miniature likeness of Lucille Darrington that had saved the life of Lance Grenville!

"Take the carriage, Paul, to bear his body home in, and we will return on your horses," said Lance Grenville, sadly, and mounting the very animal ridden there by Colonel Darrington, the unhappy man rode away, followed by his brother, who felt deeply for him in his sorrow, yet rejoiced secretly that the affair had terminated as it had.

In the meantime Paul Van Loo, aided by the servants, had placed the body in the carriage, which at once rolled rapidly away toward the Darrington villa, where the longing, staring eyes of Lucille beheld its approach, and with a cry of joy she sprung to her feet, for she recognized the vehicle, and believed that those who had gone forth with deadly intent had returned as friends.

Eagerly she watched the carriage, saw it halt before the broad stairs, the door open, and then, as her eyes fell on the dark, dead face of her father, she uttered a shriek of anguish and fell heavily upon the floor, where she lay like one whose life-cords had snapped in twain.

CHAPTER III.

A WOMAN'S CURSE.

TOWARD the close of day, several years after the death of Colonel Darrington by the hand of Launcelot Grenville, a rakish-looking schooner was standing in from the Gulf, and heading for a small cove, sheltered by a heavily-wooded point of land of what is now the coast of the State of Mississippi.

That the schooner was an armed craft was evident at a glance at her build and rig, for vessels of her long, narrow hull, and single-stick masts that raked far aft, with an almost piratical air, were not found in the merchant service.

As she drew nearer the land, a person would have discerned upon her decks four guns to a broadside, and a bow and stern chaser mounted upon a pivot, while a crew of sixty men were idly grouped about, looking at the pretty villa plantations that dotted the coast.

Upon the quarter-deck were several officers, who, like the men, had a foreign air, and whose dark faces, medium-sized statures and bright eyes denoted that they were of Mexican origin.

The officers wore uniforms, elaborately trimmed with gold lace, and the sailors were attired in blue shirts, white duck pants, and skull-caps encircled by a white band upon which was embroidered in green silk a serpent.

One person upon the quarter-deck stood near the helmsman, directing him how to steer, and that this man commanded the destinies of the schooner was evident at a glance.

Possessing a tall, commanding form, attired in a costly uniform, and with a strikingly handsome face, in which a settled sadness was blended with sternness, he was a man both to fear and admire, and always to respect.

Searchingly his eyes ran along the shores, and the wind being favorable, he gave an order to the helmsman to head toward a certain point, where the white walls of a villa gleamed through a dense mass of foliage.

As the schooner neared the shore the sun went down behind the western horizon, and half a score of small pleasure yachts that were sailing upon the waters, filled with gay parties, headed for their respective anchorages, and darkness settled upon the sea just as the armed vessel swept up into the wind and dropped anchor within a quarter of a mile from the land.

Instantly the sails were lowered and furled, and the schooner rode quietly upon the waves, as silent as though the three-score men upon her decks had gone to rest.

Thus an hour passed away, and then a reddish glare was visible on the eastern horizon, and into the clear skies sailed the moon, convoyed by fleets of stars upon her way.

As the silvery beams of light marked a path across the rippling waters, a boat was lowered over the schooner's side, and into it sprung a single personage, who seized the oars and pulled with a strong, quick stroke toward the shore.

As the moonlight fell upon his face it displayed the officer who had guided the schooner to her anchorage.

Landing under the shelter of the cliff he dragged the boat half out of the water, by a slight effort of his great strength, and quickly ascended to the hill above.

Here he paused, and a shudder ran through his frame, as he stood with folded arms gazing down upon an open, grass-covered spot in front of him.

"Here am I again upon the scene that has proven so fatal to my name," he muttered, in a low, deep voice.

"A spot where I buried every hope for the future, and a love that almost drives me to madness when I recall what I lost; but, God knows I was driven to it, and that a bitter curse has dogged my footsteps."

For a moment he remained in silence, and his face grew cold and stern, as he seemed brooding over the past; then again he spoke in the same deep tones:

"What devilish impulse has brought me here I cannot tell; but certain it is an irresistible desire has made me come again to the scenes where I have suffered so much."

"A short mile from here, and but a year ago, I stood upon a gallows, condemned to die, a Cain-accursed man; but, through the love and courage of my faithful slaves I escaped, and my own hand struck down the base wretch who had sworn my life away as my brother's murderer—that dearly-loved brother who now lives doubtless happy in the love of the woman who also charged me as guilty of the crime of Cain," and he glanced down the coast to where lights glimmered from the windows of a lordly house, once his own.

"Ah me; how bitterly cruel Fate has dogged my steps, and now led me back to this spot—and why?"

"God knows why; but I am the football of destiny and must not hesitate now but go where-soever my guardian angel, be she good or evil, would lead me—and she leads me yonder."

He turned abruptly and glanced in the other direction from the villa in which the lights were visible, and there his eyes rested upon another house half a mile distant—the place toward which the schooner had headed when a league out from the land.

With a hasty step he strode away from the spot that seemed to recall such embittered memories, and crossing the highway approached a massive gateway that seemed crumbling rapidly to decay by total neglect.

Springing over the fence he stood hesitating in the grounds, which were overgrown with rank weeds and underbrush, while back a few hundred paces arose dark and gloomy the walls of a large mansion, now almost hidden by the dense growth of trees surrounding it.

"There she lived, and—perhaps died; but whether she is alive or dead I will soon know; for yonder burying-ground will tell the story."

"'Twas said she committed suicide after she knew her father fell by my hand, and then that story was contradicted and none knew where she had gone.

"She cannot live in yonder old mansion, which time is rapidly making a ruin of; but I shall see— Hal!"

Quickly he bounded into the shadow of the massive gateway as the roll of wheels came to his ears, and an instant after a carriage appeared on the highway, while its occupants were discussing the presence of the rakish-looking schooner lying at anchor so near inland, and which the moonlight plainly revealed, floating as silent as a coffin upon the waters.

"It looks like a pirate vessel, and I will not have an instant's sleep until it sails away," said a merry voice in the vehicle, while another answered in girlish tones:

"Oh, I would so like it to be a buccaneer craft, commanded by a dashing, handsome young chief."

Then the carriage rolled on out of hearing of the man crouching in the shadow, and the moonlight showed a grim look upon his face as he arose to his full height again.

"Ah, no, my fair friends, yonder craft does not float the skull and cross-bones at her peak, though Heaven knows I have had cause enough to make a very devil out of me; but I must not stand here," and he again pushed on, carefully, though fearlessly approaching the house.

Ascending the broad steps, which trembled beneath his feet, he walked noiselessly round the piazza to the rear of the mansion and there suddenly halted, as a dim light shone from the window.

With step as noiseless and stealthy as that of a panther he crept up and glanced in at the open window.

He beheld a room that had once been handsomely furnished, but the furniture was now worn and faded, yet still had an air of neatness upon all.

At a table, upon which stood a lamp, sat an old negress in a calico dress and bandana handkerchief, engaged in knitting, while she hummed in a low voice a camp-meeting air, keeping slow time with her needles.

Upon a chair near the broad fireplace, in which glowed a few coals, was an old negro man, his head frosted with the snows of three-score and ten years.

He held a pipe between his lips and was gazing into the fire with that listless, thoughtless look habitual to old age, which gives the idea that those nearing the grave are ever looking back into the bygone with memories only sad.

From the room were two doors, one evidently leading out upon a back piazza and the other into what appeared a bedchamber.

"Here I can learn what I would know about her; but I will first seek yonder, for I would not be seen here by any one, if I can avoid it."

So saying the man retraced his way around the piazza, and descending the steps went across the grounds in the direction of a distant grove of trees.

Crossing an open lawn or field he skulked rapidly along as the moonlight fell full upon him, and hastily darted into the shadow of the trees.

It was the same grove that had been the fatal trysting-place of Launcelot Grenville and Lucille Darrington years before; but here, as upon the mansion, rested an air of neglect and decay, for the little fence that inclosed the burying-ground was half-broken down, and rank weeds had hidden the graves from sight—not all the mounds that marked the resting-places of the dead, for one was free from rude growth upon it, and the marble at its head shone pure and white in the moonlight.

Quickly the man bent over and read the inscription:

"ERECTED TO THE MEMORY
OF
MY FATHER,

FERDINAND DARRINGTON,

WHO FELL BY THE HAND OF

LAUNCELOT VERTNER GRENVILLE,

Who, by his act, buried in this grave my every hope
in life."

With a groan of unspeakable anguish the man staggered back, while from his white lips broke the cry:

"Oh, Heaven have mercy! I needed but this blow from her to fill my cup of bitterness to overflowing. Lucille, oh, Lucille! how you have misjudged me, and how your love has turned to hate, to cause you to place there on enduring marble the story of the fatal act of mine against your father."

The proud head was lowered, and the gauntlet-gloved hands crept up and hid the face, as though to shut out the scene from view.

For some moments he stood thus, his strong frame quivering, like a leaf shaken by the wind, and then he started, for a clear, ringing voice suddenly spoke his name:

"Launcelot Grenville!"

Instantly the eyes of the man fell upon the

form of a woman standing not ten feet from him, and where the light of the moon, penetrating the foliage, fell full upon her.

As motionless as though carved in stone, dressed in pure white, and with her wealth of hair hanging loose over her shoulders and adown her back, she looked like some ghostly inhabitant risen from the grave at her feet.

Though her face was youthful, it was livid, and each feature was imprinted with the mark of sorrow and suffering, while her hair was as white as snow and shone like silver threads in the light of the moon.

One arm was outstretched, and the index finger pointed straight at the man before her, while upon it sparkled, like molten fire, a ruby of immense size and wondrous beauty.

The man essayed to speak, to move, but neither tongue nor feet would obey his will, and he, too, stood motionless, the two, with the weird, strange scene around them, making a startling, fearful tableau, one which few people would care to look upon in reality.

A moment they stood thus, and then once more the full, rich tones of the woman's voice were heard.

"Launcelot Grenville, how dare you stand there by the grave of the man whom you destroyed!"

"Lucille! Lucille!"

The cry was like that of a lost soul imploring mercy, and the gold-braided arms were stretched forth in earnest supplication; but he made no step toward the woman, from whom now came in the hoarse tones of intensified passion:

"Launcelot Grenville, I curse you!"

CHAPTER IV.

A PRISONER.

"No, no, no, Lucille; do not curse me, guilty though I am of having taken the life of your father. Recall those words, I beseech you!" and Launcelot Grenville made a step toward the woman, whose passionate love for him had now turned into as passionate hatred.

"Back, sir! Do not touch me with your red fingers, for the stain upon them will never wear off."

"Ay, Launcelot Grenville, I hate you, and I curse you with my last breath, and will make even your iron heart feel—will make even your strong frame tremble at the ruin your deed has wrought. Behold!"

Her right hand was suddenly raised above her head, and in it, held with firm grasp, Launcelot Grenville beheld the glitter of steel.

The next instant the keen blade descended, and, as the horrified man sprung forward to stay the blow, it sunk into her bosom.

He caught the falling form in his strong arms, and in a tone of thrilling earnestness, cried:

"Oh, Lucille, Lucille, what have you done? My cup of life's bitterness was already drunk to the dregs, but you now have made me your murderer, and it is more than I can bear. Lucille, speak to me."

But no word came from the tightly-closed lips; the head, with its wealth of hair, dropped back, and letting the lovely form slip from his arms to the ground, the stricken man sprung to his feet and staggered from the spot like a drunken man, while from the leafy covert above came the dismal hoot of an owl.

Faster and faster he walked, mechanically directing his way back toward the old homestead, and tottering up the steps of the piazza he again stood before the open window.

Within the room the old negress still kept up her monotonous humming and knitting, while the aged negro had dropped off to sleep.

"Seek your young mistress at the grave of her father!"

Like a knell of death the deep voice broke upon the ears of the two occupants of the room, causing the woman to cry out, and the man to spring to his feet in superstitious horror.

But, unmindful of the result Launcelot Grenville bounded away, and with the speed of a deer fled along toward the beach, while above him skurried dark masses of storm-clouds, hiding the moon from view.

Like a hunted stag he rushed along, passing the spot where he had slain Ferd Darrington, and dashing down the cliff path stood beside his boat.

The waters were already foam-capped, and a fierce wind was rising, which sighed in the pines on the hill, and caused the sea to moan dismally.

As though it had been a toy, he launched his boat, and springing in, seized the oars and bent to his task of pulling right into the teeth of the rising gale.

It was a hard struggle, and the waves, momentarily rising higher and higher, dashed over him, wetting him through and through; but, what cared he? and as for the danger he revealed in it, and would have gladly gone down to his death then and there; but, even in his poignant grief and despair, he thought of his crew—the brave men who had followed him for years over the trackless waters, and he was determined to save them, for his schooner was anchored upon a lee shore, and he knew would be wrecked did he not succeed in reaching her.

With giant strength he bent to his oars, and the light boat would now and then bound from wave to wave, and several times the plucky oarsman believed that he must go down; but presently he was under the lee of his schooner, and his ringing hail soon brought a dozen ropes to his aid and dragged his little craft on board.

"We are drifting badly, sir, and the gale seems increasing," said an officer, addressing him in Spanish.

"Ay, ay, sir! I know the schooner's danger well. Up with those anchors, lads, and close-reel and set the foremast staysail and mainsail!"

The men gave a cheer as the voice of their captain rung out over the deck, and as the anchors left the bottom the sails were set, and the bows of the schooner swung off, to be driven under by the force of the winds; then the craft went plowing through the foam-covered waters.

Instantly Launcelot Grenville sprung to the helm, and, by his own mighty strength, held the craft upon her course, while the officers and crew stood at their posts, waiting, and watching the tall form at the wheel, with confidence in their commander, though now all was midnight blackness around them.

"A fit night to follow my visit home. Home? Heaven help the name! I have no home now but the sea, and no hope except in the wild storm and deadly battle," and the grief-tracked man glanced in the direction of the land, where suddenly flashed up half a dozen bright fires along the shore, beacons lighted by the planters, to show the struggling mariners caught out in the storm, where lay death and danger.

But Launcelot Grenville needed not these beacons to guide him on his way, as he knew every foot of water around, and holding his helm with grasp of iron held the schooner on her course, though before him, and upon either side the crew beheld a chain of islands that made them shudder as they swept by them.

"Ready all! Ready about!"

Instantly the men sprung forward to obey the order; there was a wild flapping of canvas, a deluge of water over the bows, a reeling and trembling of the hull, and the schooner darted away on another course, having passed through the island chain and gained the open Gulf, where the waves ran in untrammelled fury, and the winds swept relentlessly down upon the devoted craft.

Calling two helmsmen to the wheel, and giving them directions what course to steer, Launcelot descended into his elegantly-furnished cabin, and threw himself, all dripping as he was, down upon a lounge, covering his face with his hands as though to shut out some fearful phantom that rose before him.

How long he lay thus he never knew; but he was suddenly aroused by wild cries on the deck, a staggering of the vessel, and then a tremendous crash that threw him to his feet.

Rushing from the cabin a fearful scene presented itself, for above him towered a lofty hull, and beneath his feet his beautiful schooner was sinking, cut in twain by the huge vessel that had run him down, while his crew had been hurled into the seething waters.

Mechanically he raised his hands and grasped firmly the anchor cable of the huge ship, and drew himself up above the scene of death and ruin, to, the next instant, be dragged on board by ready hands, just as he sunk into unconsciousness, from a severe blow he had received by being dashed against the side of the vessel. It was days before Launcelot returned to consciousness, for high fever followed his injury, and for a long time his life was despaired of; but through the dreary hours of his illness he was most tenderly cared for by all, and especially did one person hang over his pillow by night and day.

One day the light of reason came back into the dark eyes, and they gazed wearily around the large cabin, out of the stern ports upon the placid waters, tinted by the declining sun, and then they fell upon a person seated near him.

It was a dead calm and the ship rolled lazily with the swell, and not a sound was heard, for the sailors were enjoying a *siesta* on deck, and a silence that could be felt rested upon all around.

Closing his eyes again, Launcelot Grenville sunk into a dreamy repose; but only for a few moments, and then the lids again unclosed and he beheld what appeared to be an angel bending over him.

"Where am I?" he asked faintly.

The face above him flushed, as though with joy, and a sweet, low voice answered:

"You are safe, and among friends; but you have been very ill, and must keep quiet."

"And who are you?" he asked, gazing straight into the lovely face.

"I am your self-constituted nurse, and you must mind me and be quiet."

"I must be in Paradise to have an angel for a nurse," was the low answer, and the words brought a deep blush to the maiden's face, for she was barely nineteen, and exquisitely lovely.

"You are indeed better, when you can pay compliments; but for a long time we believed you would die."

"Yes, I recall all now—and my crew!" and the strong man shuddered.

"You were the only one saved," said the maiden, sadly.

"I was the only one that should have been lost. My poor brave lads, all lost, and I saved! Ah me, ah me!"

"You do not regret your being saved, do you?" asked the maiden, in surprise.

"Yes!"

The word came out with almost savage earnestness, and the maiden started as she gazed into the flashing eyes and fearing to excite her patient, she said, softly:

"You must now get some rest, and you will feel better after it. You must mind me, or I will send the captain."

"I will obey; but tell me first, what ship is this, and where bound?"

"The English ship *Reindeer*, bound from Mobile to Cadiz, Spain. Two weeks ago, in the storm, we ran your schooner down."

"One question more—who are you?"

"I am the captain's daughter."

"I thank you," and Launcelot Grenville turned his face away, and soon sunk to sleep.

When he awoke, several hours after, he was greatly refreshed, and saw by his side a stout, red-faced man, whose brow at once clouded as he caught the invalid's eye.

"You feel better, sir?" he asked, bluntly.

"Yes, sir."

"Your name is—"

"Launcelot Grenville, a captain in the Mexican navy."

"Did you land on the Mississippi coast the night I ran you down?" and the captain awaited the answer with considerable interest.

"I did, sir."

"You met there a maiden by the name of Lucille, I believe?"

"Great God, sir! tell me what you know of her?" and Launcelot Grenville arose from his lounge.

"Be calm, sir, and, painful as it is to me, I must do my duty, for your own words have proven you a murderer, and your victim was a woman. You are my prisoner, Captain Grenville."

Launcelot Grenville fell back upon his pillows, his face ashen pale, for the gallows again loomed up before him, and he felt that if tried for the murder of Lucille, he would be condemned, as circumstantial evidence was fearfully against him.

In his delirium he had told *all*, and he had been saved from drowning to meet a far worse fate; he had been nursed back to life to die ignominiously—his was a bitter fate, indeed.

Hopeless, and in despair, he said, calmly:

"I am in your power; do with me as you will."

CHAPTER V.

THE BLACK FLAG.

THE good ship *Reindeer* bounded swiftly along upon her course, and in due time neared the shores of Spain, and the hearts of the crew were gladdened and their voyage was nearly ended.

"To-morrow, Maud, we will be in Cadiz, if this wind holds good," said Captain Menken to his beautiful daughter, as, coming on deck, he found her idly gazing over the taffrail.

"And you will deliver the prisoner up to the American consul, there, father?" asked Maud.

"Certainly, and he will be sent back to the United States, tried, and hung for his crimes."

"Father, I do not believe he is guilty of crime," said the maiden, boldly.

"Why, he confessed to having murdered a young girl, and her father, too."

"In the wild delirium of fever he called himself a murderer, true, sir; but I do not believe that it was more than the imagination of a heated brain."

"Maud, I like not your defending this man, and I am angry with you for not having made known all he said in his delirium, and, had I not accidentally heard him accuse himself of murder, you would have kept it from me."

Maud Menken made no reply, and her father paced the deck in no amiable mood.

"He shall not die, for I do not believe him guilty. A man with his face could do no base act, and his self-condemnation was but the ravings of fever."

"I nursed him back to life, and I will not let him die now. Ah! me, how he must suffer, his vessel and crew lost, and he ironed, hand and foot in that loathsome hold—"

"Sail, ho!"

The ringing cry from the maintop suddenly interrupted the unpleasant musings of Maud Menken, and caused her father to glance anxiously around, for his vessel was then in a dangerous locality, a favorite cruising ground of the Moorish and Algerine corsairs, who, at the time of which I write, were a deadly foe to the commerce of the world.

"Where away, sir?" called out the captain in trumpet tones.

"Three points off the port bow, sir, and heading toward us," was the reply of the look-out.

"I see her now—a large, lateen-rigged craft, and I verily believe a corsair," said Captain Menken, and he at once changed the ship's course, and squared away before the wind, for

he did not wish to allow the stranger to get near him.

"She is after us, sir," said the first mate, watching the other vessel through his glass.

"Go to the mizzen-top, Burton, and see what you make of her," said the captain with some anxiety in his tones.

In a short while the mate descended to the deck.

"She is a Moor, sir, and armed heavily, while her decks are crowded. We will have to do our best in showing a clean pair of heels."

"You are right. Call all hands to set every rag that will draw, and we will see if the *Reindeer* cannot drop yonder bloodhound."

The order was quickly obeyed, and the fleet vessel was driven along at a tremendous rate of speed. But upon her wake hung a faster craft, and each glance that Captain Menken cast astern, he saw that the stranger was rapidly overhauling him.

"Mr. Burton, get the guns ready, and arm the crew; he outnumbers us three to one, but we must fight for it," said the captain with determination, and in ten minutes more the crew of the *Reindeer*, thirty all told, were standing at quarters, their faces pale but resolute, for well they knew if the stranger proved to be a Moorish corsair and they were defeated, no mercy need they expect.

"Father, there is one other that can aid you."

"Who, girl?" and Captain Menken turned almost gruffly upon his daughter, who, since the death of her mother years before, had always accompanied him on his voyages.

"The Mexican captain, sir."

"Never! He would but bring defeat upon us, and if we are taken, he will have been the Jonah of the ship," said the old seaman with some asperity.

Maud turned away and a moment after went into the cabin.

Going forward she cautiously and unseen, for all the crew were on deck, descended into the ship's hold, bearing in her hand a ship's lantern.

"Ah! Miss Menken, this is an honor," and from a mattress, upon which he had been lying, Arthur Grenville half arose, for, chained as he was to the floor, he could not stand upright.

"Captain Grenville, I have come to tell you that our vessel is chased by what is supposed to be a corsair, and my father refusing to release you, I have determined to do so, for you shall not be cut to pieces while bound hand and foot."

"Miss Menken, you are a noble girl, and I thank you from my heart; release me and if necessary I will come on deck to aid in defending the ship."

"Not now must you come; only when the combat has begun—then come to the cabin and I will have arms ready for your use."

Bending over him, with the key she had brought with her, she unlocked the irons from his feet and hands, and then quickly turned away.

Once more upon deck she beheld that the strange craft was now not a mile away, and upon her decks were scores of men, while her whole appearance proved beyond doubt that she was a corsair.

"Maud, my child, go to the cabin, for they are going to open fire upon us; but remember that your old father and his brave lads will defend you to the last."

The crew heard the words of their captain and broke into a ringing cheer, for Maud was beloved by every man on board.

With a breaking heart Maud threw herself into her father's arms, kissed him affectionately, and waving her hand to the sailors, returned to the cabin, just as a shot from the bows of the corsair shrieked above the decks of the *Reindeer*.

As the gun was fired, a black roll of bunting went up from the deck of the stranger, and the wind catching its folds, the hideous black flag of the Moorish pirate was revealed.

At the sight of the sable ensign a groan broke from the lips of the *Reindeer's* crew, but not a man quailed or shrunk from the deadly duty all felt was before them.

"Mr. Burton, let the stern guns answer the cutthroat," said Captain Menken, calmly, and the two howitzers upon the stern of the ship poured an iron hail upon the corsair, doing considerable execution upon his crowded decks.

Then the firing on both sides became hot and fierce, and soon Maud, who was crouching upon her knees in the cabin, felt a terrific shock, and heard wild yells, as the two vessels came together and the corsairs hurled themselves upon the deck of the ship.

Unable longer to stand the fearful suspense, Maud started to go on deck, when several forms bounded down the companionway and confronted her.

With a cry of terror she shrunk back, for she beheld the cruel faces of the merciless Moors looking upon her, and one, with a cry of joy, sprung forward to seize her.

But he was suddenly hurled backward with a force that sent him into the furthest corner of the cabin, and, seizing from the table a sword and pistols, a man faced the ruthless gang.

"Thank God!" broke from the lips of Maud, and she crouched down and gazed upon the

scene that was at once enacted before her, for the Moors now rushed upon the daring man who had come to the maiden's rescue.

Instantly one, two pistol-shots rung out, a clash of steel followed, and Launcelot Grenville was the victor, while at his feet lay dead three Moors.

"Miss Menken, I beg of you to conceal yourself. I will go on deck to your father's aid," cried Launcelot, and seizing the arms of the slain Moors, he bounded from the cabin up the companionway.

The scene that there met his gaze was horrible to contemplate, for the deck was slippery with blood and covered with the dead and dying of both vessels, while the remainder of the *Reindeer's* crew had retreated aft, and were holding at bay the desperate Moors.

Wounded, overpowered, and expecting no mercy, the crew of the *Reindeer*, under their old commander, determined to fight to the last, for in the ship's cabin they knew there was one who looked to them to save her from a fate worse than death.

"At them, lads, and hurl them into the sea!"

All started at the deep, commanding voice, and suddenly a tall form bounded forward and sprung right upon the Moorish line.

"The Mexican! the Mexican!" yelled the crew of the *Reindeer*, and they pressed forward at the back of the reckless man, and the corsairs found themselves hurled backward by main force.

From the companionway, Maud, who had followed Launcelot Grenville, beheld his magnificent courage, saw him throw himself into the midst of the Moors, and beheld man after man drop dead before the sweep of his strong arm, while, with renewed courage and hope, her father and his men rushed to the attack.

For awhile Maud believed that victory would yet fall upon their side; but then the low hull of the Moorish vessel again ran alongside the ship, and from its decks, over the high bulwarks, poured another large force of corsairs, headed by a man in brilliant uniform and of striking appearance.

In the Moorish tongue he cheered his followers, and sweeping forward they drove the crew of the *Reindeer* again aft, while their leader and Launcelot met face to face.

Still staring in horror at the awful scene, Maud saw a quick passage of arms between the Moorish chief and Launcelot Grenville, and the jewel-bitted sword of the former struck from his grasp.

Then there was a rush, a dozen forms hurled themselves upon the Mexican captain, a score of savage Moors rushed upon the few remaining men supporting Captain Menken, and Maud saw her father fall and knew no more, for she swooned away, and rolled down the companionway-steps and lay like a lifeless heap upon the cabin floor, her ears deaf to the groans of the wounded and wild cheers of the corsairs over their hard won victory.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CORSAIR CHIEF.

WHEN Lance Grenville, by his superior skill and strength, struck the cimeter of the Moor chief from his grasp, he expected to die at once.

But, not a muscle quivered as the corsairs rushed upon him, and he stood upon his guard to receive them, fearless, determined and courting death at their hands.

But the chief in a loud voice, and in the Moorish tongue, gave an order to a dozen of his men, and dropping their weapons, they rushed *en masse* upon their daring foe.

Taken by surprise by this style of fighting, Launcelot Grenville had but time for one sweep of his sword, and then he was dragged to the deck, and in spite of his struggles, securely bound and left lying among a heap of dead and dying men.

From where he lay he saw the rush of the Moors upon Captain Menken and his few remaining followers and knew then that the fate of poor Maud was sealed.

Why he had not been killed he could not tell, and as he beheld not one of the *Reindeer's* crew alive, he was glad that his life was spared, for he possessed an indomitable will, and hoped in some way to be able to serve the maiden who had so tenderly nursed him in days of wild delirium, and who had freed him from his irons, that he might not die like a dog.

At an order from their officers, the Moors made short work of the dead and dying who strewed the deck, for all were hurled into the sea, after being robbed of what valuables they possessed, and the cries of the wounded were enough to awaken pity in any heart not in the breast of a Moorish or Algerine corsair.

Over him a short consultation was held, and Launcelot could see that some were in favor of throwing him overboard, bound as he was; but others would not allow it, and he was transferred to the deck of the corsair, for the two vessels now lay side by side.

At that moment an under officer approached, and releasing the prisoner of his bonds, beckoned to him to follow, and he was led into a luxuriously furnished cabin of the corsair, where his eyes fell upon the unconscious form

Maud Menken lying upon a divan of velvet, and kneeling beside her, bathing her face in otto de rose water, was the corsair leader.

As Launcelot entered, the chief arose to his feet and faced him, a look of admiration and curiosity blended upon his face.

He was a splendid specimen of manhood, attired in all the magnificence of an oriental uniform, his breast sparkling with precious stones of rare value.

His face was darkly bronzed, exceedingly handsome, and yet cold and stern, while his hair, black as ink, hung upon his shoulders.

With a gesture, he motioned Launcelot to a seat upon a divan, and, to his great surprise, said in perfect English:

"You are English, I believe, sir?"

"No, I am an American by birth, but an officer in foreign service."

"Ah, an American? My mother was an American. You commanded yonder vessel, I believe?"

"You are mistaken again, sir. That vessel ran my schooner down in a storm in the Gulf of Mexico, and I alone was saved."

"Indeed! you are lucky."

"Pardon me if I differ with you; any fate were better than that of being a prisoner to a Moor," said Launcelot, fearlessly.

The chief arched his eyebrows, smiled meaningfully, and said with admiration in his tone:

"I never saw men fight more gallantly than did the crew of yonder ship, and you, sir, are the best swordsman I ever met, for never before did I cross blades with my equal, while you proved my superior, and fought like a very devil."

"And all to no service, excepting in riding the world of a few merciless wretches," said Launcelot, contemptuously. "And the maiden?" he asked.

The chief again smiled, and said:

"This maiden is in a deep swoon, and I fear may not recover."

"I hope to Heaven she may not," was the fearless retort.

"Ah, you certainly are not complimentary to your captor; but what is the maiden to you?"

"One who nursed me through long days of illness, and whom I would give my life to save from harm."

"You love her, then?"

"No, I respect and admire her; my heart is dead to all love."

The chief gazed quickly into the face of the speaker, and seemed to read intuitively that some deep grief had fallen upon his prisoner, and his voice was kind, as he said:

"The future may not be as gloomy as the past seems to have been to you; but aid me in restoring this girl to consciousness."

"Never! no act of mine will bring her back to a realization of the shame that will fall upon her as a corsair's captive."

"I will spare your life, if you will aid me."

"My life is worthless to me; if you wish it, take it."

The chief gazed earnestly upon his prisoner for a moment, and then said quietly:

"As I told you, my mother was an American, captured on a vessel from the United States, and my father was an Amazerg chief; hence I have a sympathy for you, and will spare your life. Nay, more: will make you an officer under me."

"Thank you; I care not to become a pirate; and, as I before told you, my life I do not care for."

"Then I will send you ashore and you will be sold as a slave."

"So be it; and this young girl?"

"Will be sent to the sultan's harem."

"Her fate is worse than mine. I pity her, and hope she will never recover from the deep swoon she now lies in," said Launcelot Grenville, fearlessly.

"You are free-spoken, sir; but I pardon you, and will treat you as my guest, until we reach my stronghold on the coast of Morocco; from there, I regret to say, you will have to serve a Moorish master."

Launcelot Grenville made no reply, but turned away, while the chief once more devoted himself to the restoration of poor Maud from the deep swoon in which she had been so long, lying like one dead.

But at length the beautiful eyes slowly opened, and with a strange delicacy, not to be looked for in one who had won the name of the Red Rais, on account of his cruel deeds, the corsair chief stepped back from view, and said:

"Let her see your face, sir."

Launcelot at once advanced to the side of Maud, who, at sight of him, stretched forth her hands, and cried:

"Thank Heaven, you are safe! but my poor father, what of him?"

"He died like a brave man, Miss Menken, defending his deck."

"Dead? My poor father dead, and I am all alone," and the poor girl bowed her head in deepest grief.

"Would that were all, poor girl."

Maud started at the deep tones of Launcelot, and looked inquiringly at him.

"What can be worse?" she whispered.

"You are the captive of a Moorish corsair."

"And you! are not you also a captive?"

"Yes; but I am a man, and you are a beautiful woman."

She understood him, and a shudder shook her frame, as again the proud head was bowed in sorrow.

But in a moment it was raised, and the eyes flashed, as she said:

"I do not fear to die, and with my own hand will I take my life when hope has left me. I can free my soul, if not my body, from the power of the cruel Moor."

"Lady, let me beseech you not to harm yourself. In my care you are safe, and I will see that no indignity is offered you, for you are destined for the palace of the sultan," and the corsair stepped forward and confronted Maud, who shrunk back at sight of him.

"You, sir, as a Moorish subject, may deem the sultan's palace an abode of honor; but I do not, and—" and she dropped upon her knees before her captor, "and, for the sake of all you hold dear, free me from the hated life before me."

"You do not seem like a Moor; you speak my language as though it were your own, and will have mercy upon me."

"Lady, from the moment that you came on board my vessel, I hold no power over you; you are the prize of the Sidi, my master," and the corsair left the cabin, and Maud was alone with Launcelot Grenville.

In half an hour the chief returned, and the corsair craft was under way, while astern came the Reindeer, a Moorish crew on board.

In his courtly way the Red Rais made his captive guests feel as comfortable as possible, and so won upon their regard that they began to hope that he would yet rescue them from the fearful fates in store for them—the one to go to the harem of the Sidi of Morocco, the other to become the slave of a Moorish master.

Allowed unrestricted freedom on board the corsair vessel, Launcelot and Maud were pacing the deck together, the second day after their capture, and, as was now their custom, plotting some means of escape, when the quick eye of the sailor caught sight of a distant sail.

Without appearing to notice it, he said, quietly:

"There is a sail in sight, and from her rig she is a man-of-war, either English or American. See, it is just over the port quarter."

"I see it, and the Moorish look-out has not discovered it," said Maud, earnestly.

"And I hope will not. See, it is heading for us! Pray Heaven it be a fleet American cruiser, for your sake."

Nearer and nearer came the strange craft; higher and higher it arose above the horizon, until there was no doubt of two things regarding it in the mind of Launcelot—first, that it was a vessel-of-war, and second, that it was an American.

"The Moors have not yet discovered it—how strange," said Maud, in a whisper.

"It is because she comes up astern. She is a small brig-of-war, carrying a dozen guns, and will attack this craft, strong as it is, if her commander has the right pluck, and from the way he comes on, I believe he has. There comes El Rais."

As Launcelot spoke the Red Rais came from the cabin, and bowing pleasantly to his captives, his eyes swept the sea.

Instantly they fell upon the strange sail, not a league distant, and then upon his crew, and they fairly blazed with fury, as in thunder tones he cried, in the Moorish tongue:

"Dogs of a burnt grandfather! do you sleep when the foe is upon you? Ahoy, here, the watch and the officer of the deck! To my feet, blind hounds!"

Instantly all was excitement on board, and the drowsy watch were now wide awake, and with the officer of the deck, came walking sullenly toward their chief.

"To your guns, dogs! Now, hounds of a cursed race, what have you to say?" and he turned his flaming eyes upon the *Soto Rais** and the two look-outs, who shrunk before his gaze.

"Mercy, oh mighty skimmer of the sea, and eagle of the blue waters!" cried the *Soto Rais*.

But the eyes fell upon the two seamen, and dropping upon their knees they sung out in chorus:

"Mighty *Rais el Rais*,† thy slaves beg thy mercy!"

But there was no mercy in that handsome, dark face, and waving his hand he said simply:

"You must die, for your blindness may cost better men their lives."

The three doomed men bowed their heads in submission, and at another wave of the hand a negro of giant form approached, bearing in his hand a huge sword.

"Let them die; do your duty," said the chief, sternly.

Up to this moment neither Launcelot nor Maud had believed that the guilty three would be very severely punished; but now they saw that their fate was to be death, and the maiden

made a step forward as though to beg for them; but Launcelot drew her back, saying, quietly:

"It may seem cruel, but there will be three less for yonder vessel to fight, and if spared, these fellows would fight like fiends to redeem themselves."

Maud turned away, and yet her ears heard the *swish* of the sword, and the thud as it struck the neck of the *Soto Rais*.

The negro executioner knew his hideous duty well for the head dropped from the shoulders and rolled down to the lee scuppers, a hideous sight.

Instantly the executioner approached the next victim, and again the revolting scene was repeated, and again, until the three men, with no cry for mercy upon their lips, had suffered the penalty to which their chief had condemned them.

As the bodies were thrown into the sea, a puff of smoke came from the bows of the strange vessel, and a solid shot came flying after the corsair craft, but fell short.

The chief glanced over his vessel, to see that his crew were all ready for action, and then, with a placid, smiling face, approached the stern, where Launcelot and Maud stood.

"You saw that sail, doubtless, sir?" he asked, inquiringly.

"Yes, when only her topmasts were visible," frankly returned Launcelot.

"She intends to engage me, and I am glad I sent your vessel straight to the stronghold, as I will have all I can do to take care of myself, for the Americans fight well, sir."

"You recognize then that the vessel is an American?"

"Oh, yes, I have twice before fought that vessel. It is the brig-of-war, *Hornet*."

Launcelot Grenville started, for the last time he had heard of his brother Arthur, he was a junior lieutenant on board the *Hornet*. A crowd of bitter memories rushed upon him.

"Perhaps we may change places, Captain Grenville, and I, in a short while, be a captive; if so, I will to you this ring; it will be a talisman to protect you from all Moorish and Algerine corsairs," and El Rais handed to Launcelot a massive gold ring in which was set a blood-red stone, with a diamond of rare luster imbedded in the center.

Within the ring was engraved in Moorish letters, what read, when translated:

"Respect the Pledge—Red Rais el Rais."

Mechanically Launcelot Grenville took the ring, or, rather allowed the chief to place it upon his finger, and, ere he could reply, there came another shot from the American brig, which went flying just above the deck of the corsair.

"Permit me to escort you to the cabin, Miss Menken," and the Rais led Maud away, white and trembling with dread and hope, while Launcelot turned his looks earnestly upon the pursuing vessel.

In a moment El Rais returned, equipped for the fray, and in his eyes there was a dangerous glitter, while his deep voice rung out in orders to his savage crew.

Instantly the corsair vessel wore round, and from her broadside a heavy fire was poured upon the American, who, in spite of being hit hard returned the fire savagely.

Calmly surveying the combat, Launcelot Grenville at once arrived at the conclusion that the American was determined not to board the corsair, or allow the Moor to board him, well knowing the desperate courage of his foe at close quarters.

The reason for this, Launcelot discovered, was that the American seemed to have a small crew, and would trust to crippling the Moor with his guns, and either make him strike his colors, or sink him.

That the Rais was not fighting in his usual way, by running in and boarding, Launcelot saw also, and knew that he was also short of men, after his losses in his fight with the Reindeer, and the prize crew sent off on that ship; besides, he had little to gain by capturing a vessel-of-war, as beauty and booty were what the Moor wanted, and not hot shot and steel.

For some moments the two vessels swung round in a circle, pouring in a hot fire at the distance, of a few cables' length, and then each seemed to wish to draw off to a greater range; but before they separated to too great a distance Launcelot Grenville, through a glass handed him by the courteous Rais, recognized upon the quarter-deck of the American, his brother Arthur.

"I will have to run for it, for yonder comes another enemy I know well—an Englishman," and El Rais pointed off on the horizon, where was visible a sloop-of-war hastening to the scene.

Instantly he gave his orders, and away darted the corsair craft before the wind, heading directly for the Barbary coast, distant about ten leagues.

Crowding his vessel with all the canvas it could stand, the Rais flew on, while his stern guns poured upon the American a hot fire which was returned with interest.

Astern, two leagues, came the English sloop-of-war, crowded with canvas, and if the fire of the bow-guns of the brig should cripple the corsair in her rigging, Launcelot knew there

* Lieutenant. † Captain of captains.

would be but one alternative for El Rais, and that was to fight it out to the bitter end, or surrender.

"Captain Grenville, if I am crippled, I will never surrender my vessel, but blow her up with my crew; yet I will first place you and my fair captive in a small boat, and cast you free."

Launcelot was struck by the nobleness of the man, and at once extended his hand to him, which El Rais grasped, while he said with a smile:

"For the sake of Miss Menken and yourself, I could almost wish that my determination would have to be carried out; but for my sake, I would prefer that you remain my captives," and he turned away to watch the effects of the brig's fire, his face as placid as though no danger, or terrible death threatened him.

But the Moor seemed in luck, rather than the American, for a shot aimed by the Rais himself, cut away the foretopmast of the brig, and a second one also damaged the rigging.

A yell broke from the corsair crew at this, for they seemed to read their fate in their chief's face, should victory go against them.

But the English sloop-of-war was coming on with a huge bone in her teeth, and the Moor kept his vessel under all the canvas that would draw, and still poured a hot fire from his stern guns at the American, who by no means had given up the chase.

With pale, stern face, unmindful of the danger to himself, Launcelot Grenville stood on deck, watching the flying fight, and then turned his eyes ahead.

The Rais saw his look, and said quietly: "The chances are in my favor, sir; there loom up the hills of Morocco, and there is my stronghold."

"Yes, I believe that you will escape, and, as you have already shown that you are not the cruel chief you are painted, I beg of you to place your fair captive in one of your boats and leave her to be picked up by yonder vessel."

"And yourself?" quietly asked El Rais. "For myself I ask nothing; in fact I would rather become the slave of a cruel Moor, than meet one person on yonder brig."

El Rais raised his arched brows in surprise, but he answered in a tone of regret:

"I am sorry, sir, but I cannot release this lady; it is as much as my head is worth, did it get to the ears of the Sidi, and it certainly would; but for that I do not care—I have stronger reasons for wishing to detain her; but you, sir, I will drop astern in a boat, if you will accept your pardon, and you can disguise yourself so that you need not be known to the one you care not to meet."

Launcelot was surprised; what could the Rais mean?

Would he not be responsible to the Sidi for him as well as for Maud?

There was some mystery at the bottom of this he could not fathom.

"Will you disguise yourself, sir, and accept your pardon?" calmly asked El Rais.

Launcelot hesitated; here was a chance to regain his freedom, and if he did not care to be recognized by his brother a disguise would prevent.

His brother he had not seen since they parted several years before in perfect brotherly love, though rivals for the hand of a woman that had come between them.

After that parting when he determined to return to the Mexican service, and leave his brother free to marry the woman he knew that he dearly loved, Arthur Grenville had suddenly disappeared, and circumstantial evidence pointed to Launcelot Grenville as his murderer, and he was tried and convicted of the crime, but escaped, as the kind reader knows, from beneath the very gallows, and went again into the service of Mexico.

Whether his brother had married Helen Brainard he knew not, but he had once heard of him as an officer on board the *Hornet*, and on the deck of that vessel, not a mile away, he had recognized him, and his heart went forth in a longing to clasp his hand; but before him arose his trial, his sufferings, his condemnation to death, and then the terrible fate of poor Lucille, and he shrunk from meeting Arthur.

True, the return of his brother the day after Launcelot's escape from the gallows, had proved him guiltless of his death, or wrong against him; but then the grief-crushed man felt that some bitter curse haunted his life, and he determined to be considered as dead to all who had known him before.

Did he accept the offer of El Rais he would be free; but then he would leave poor Maud alone to her fate.

No, he would remain a prisoner, and perhaps in some way he could yet serve the maiden.

"I prefer to remain a prisoner, El Rais," he said, in answer to the question of the chief if he would disguise himself beyond recognition and accept his freedom.

"As you please," said El Rais, somewhat curtly, and he turned again to the duties devolving upon him.

Higher and higher loomed up the hills of Morocco, until, although the English sloop-of-war and the American brig were now both

firing upon the corsair, there seemed little doubt but that the bold chief would escape, especially as, from under the shadow of the land, were seen several vessels standing out from the hill-encircled bay, which was the rendezvous or stronghold of the piratical fleet, under the command of *El Rais Aboukah*, the name of the renowned Moorish rover.

Having reached a point from whence escape was certain, the corsair wore round and poured a heavy broadside upon the American, and then a second upon the English sloop-of-war, after which he sailed leisurely on to meet the three vessels coming to his succor, while his pursuers, with return fire, put about and stood slowly seaward, not caring to invite an action with the Moors under the guns of their stronghold.

The face of the Rais did not change when he saw his pursuers put back, and going to the cabin he called Maud upon deck.

She obeyed, though her face showed traces of suffering, and she bitterly felt the change from hope to despair.

A league more, and the shot-torn corsair sailed into the hill-locked harbor, under a salute from the forts, and the anchor was let fall just as darkness crept over land and water, and cast a deeper gloom upon the hearts of the two prisoners, who felt now no hope for the future.

CHAPTER VII.

WITHOUT MERCY.

THE harbor into which the corsair had sought refuge, was one of the rendezvous of the piratical hordes that were found along the coast of Morocco at the time of which I write.

It was strongly fortified, and from its well-protected haven, half a dozen vessels, large and small, were wont to sail forth to cruise against the commerce of the world, and though carrying the flag of the Moor, also floated above their deck the black ensign of the pirate, which certainly was more fit to represent their dark deeds.

Over this stronghold and fleet *El Rais Aboukah*, or the Red Rais, held command, while he was also a chief of a mountain tribe of Moors known as the *Amazergs*, and a brave and warlike race of which his father had been sheik before him.

Twenty-five or six years before, an American girl, a captive, had been purchased by Sheik *Aboukah*, and the Red Rais was the offspring of this ill-matched union, though the old chieftain had always treated his fair young wife with great courtesy and kindness.

Contrary to the wish of his parents, the young *Aboukah* took to the sea, and his great courage soon placed him in command of a vessel, and won for him the respect and admiration of his sultan, who made him commodore of the stronghold and fleet.

Though a bold rover, and who had won the name of the Red Rais upon account of his many victories and battles, *El Rais* was wont to spend a few months of each year at his mountain home with his parents, until death took from him his mother, and his father dying soon after, the young corsair became chief, or sheik of the *Amazerg* tribe, and from their brave ranks he formed the crew of his vessel, and his will was supreme.

Upon the arrival of the corsair craft at the harborage, Launcelot Grenville beheld the tall masts and high hull of the *Reindeer* lying at anchor near, and around her were numerous small boats carrying her cargo shoreward.

Maud recognized, also, dark though it was, the well-known rig of her father's vessel, and the tears came to her eyes, and her heart was too full to speak.

"My friends, I must still claim you as my guests, but at my quarters ashore. Come!" and *El Rais* approached the spot where his captives stood, and motioned to a large boat alongside.

Without a word they entered it, and the keel soon after grated upon the beach, and *El Rais* placed Maud on shore, and telling Launcelot to follow, led the way up the steep hillside to his quarters when on land.

Maud gazed curiously around her as she entered the home of the Moor chieftain—a low-built, yet comfortable abode in the rude style of Moorish architecture, and furnished in a style that was not confined to any one land, for there was a mixture of the Oriental and European, to which many an unfortunate vessel had contributed.

Assigning Maud a pleasant room, he escorted Launcelot to another, and to their surprise they saw no guard placed over them; but then how hopeless the thought of escape in that land of the Moor.

The following morning *El Rais* sent for his captives, and then joined them at breakfast, for his mother's training, and experience with foreigners, had made of this strange man almost a European in taste and manners.

Both of the captives noticed that the Rais seemed moody and that his brow was clouded, so they were not surprised when he said, in his quiet way:

"This morning we must part, my friends."

Neither spoke in answer, and *El Rais* continued:

"A messenger from his mighty Sidi com-

mands me to go at once on a cruise to head off a fleet of East Indiamen, and I am ordered to forward my prisoners immediately, under guard, to the capital."

Maud started, and her face grew livid; but Launcelot calmly asked:

"Have you many prisoners, *El Rais*?" "Some thirty besides yourselves, sir; but they are mostly cowardly dogs, and you could not get them to risk their lives in striking a blow for their freedom."

Launcelot Grenville's face flushed, for he saw that the Rais had read his intention.

"Besides," continued the corsair chief, "the sultan's messenger is accompanied by his own guard under the kaid of the slaves."

"Then there is no hope," groaned Maud Menken, in a broken voice.

"I must obey my sultan, lady; your escort will be ready to start within half an hour—farewell."

He held forth his hand, and Maud dropped upon her knees before him.

"Save me, oh, save me, for the sake of the mother you loved so well!"

"How can I?"

His voice was cold and his face emotionless.

"The servant who acted as my maid served your mother in the same capacity. She speaks English, and she told me you were a great chief on land as well as on the sea, and that your tribe dwelt in the mountains, a few leagues from here. Certainly a man thus powerful can ask of his sultan two unfortunate captives; he will accede to your desire, and Captain Grenville and myself can then go free, for you have a noble heart in spite of the red name you bear."

Maud spoke with deepest feeling, and in a pleading tone, but the chief's face never relaxed a muscle; he would not grant her request, and said in his even tones:

"A captive of your beauty the sultan would never yield to me."

"But he has not seen me, sir," interrupted Maud.

"His messenger has, and so has the kaid of the slaves; they saw you when we landed last night. I am sorry, but I cannot grant your request."

For an instant Maud was silent, and then she said:

"You can at least let this gentleman go free?"

"I offered him his freedom and he refused it. As much as I regret it, he must be sold into bondage."

"Heaven have mercy upon us!" groaned poor Maud; but Launcelot Grenville showed no sign of dreading his fate, though in his face dwelt deep sympathy for the maiden, while he inwardly cursed his inability to aid her.

For a moment Maud seemed utterly broken-hearted; but with great effort she controlled herself, and with haughty face and flashing eyes turned upon the chief.

"I am ready, Sir Corsair; but I am not yet the toy of a cruel tyrant."

Both the chief and Launcelot Grenville were struck with admiration at the magnificent courage of the maiden, and she certainly never looked more beautiful in her life than she did at that moment, for her form was drawn up to its full height, a flush was upon either cheek, her lips curled with scorn, and were yet resolute, while her wondrously expressive eyes flashed fire.

With a bow the chief left the room, and a few moments after a cavalcade drew up before the door, consisting of half a hundred Moorish cavalry, a score or more of miserable captives, mostly Spaniards, and among whom were several women, a gorgeously-uniformed Moor, who was the officer sent as the messenger of the sultan, and a huge negro, hideous in looks, and richly attired, whom the Rais addressed as the kaid of the slaves.

A richly-caparisoned horse was ready for Maud, and a slave woman brought and threw around her a veil, which completely hid her form and face.

Then the kaid of the slaves stepped forward and put out his arm to raise her to the saddle, but *El Rais* thrust him aside, and raising her in his arms, seated her securely, and placed the reins in her hands, the kaid scowling upon him.

"And this dog of a Christian—bind him," and the kaid turned to Launcelot, who was at once seized.

"Hold! that man rides with free arms and limbs. It is my wish he is not bound," said *El Rais*, quietly.

"Upon your head be it, oh Rais," angrily replied the kaid.

"Upon my head be it, dog of an accursed race," came the quick retort.

The kaid dropped his hand upon the gemmed hilt of his sword, but he caught the flashing eye of the corsair chief, and turned away; but there was that in his look which betokened no good to Launcelot Grenville, should he give the slightest cause of offense.

A horse was then brought, and Launcelot mounting, the cavalcade moved away, the Rais lifting his silken turban to Maud, and waving his hand in farewell to his captives.

A ride of ten leagues, through a barren, bar-

ing country, and the cavalcade came to a halt under the shadow of a low range of hills, and preparations were made for camping for the night, the captives all being considerably fatigued.

Several of the guards at once pitched a silken tent for Maud and the other female captives, and food was placed before them, while the male prisoners were allowed to shift for themselves.

Untrammelled by bonds, and his breast torn with sorrow for the fate of Maud, Launcelot Grenville walked a short distance away, but the watchful eye of the kaid was upon him, and feeling how impossible it was to escape, he threw himself down to rest, in full sight of the encampment.

Gradually the sun went down and darkness was creeping over the earth, when out from a clump of date trees dashed a band of horsemen.

Like the wind they swept around the camp, and loud and rapid rung out the rattle of musketry, as the guards of the kaid fired upon them.

A moment only did the combat last, and then the attacking horsemen dashed away, while from their midst came a loud cry:

"Save me, oh, save me!"

It was the voice of Maud Menken, and Launcelot Grenville knew that she appealed to him for aid.

Instantly he sprung into the saddle of a loose steed, and dashed away; but a loud order was heard in the voice of the kaid, a volley of musketry followed, and the flying horse, with almost a human cry, fell headlong to the earth, throwing his rider far over his head, where he lay like one dead.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN BONDAGE.

BENEATH the shelter of a few date trees, which, grouped together above a spring of water, formed an oasis in the desert—an island of verdure surrounded by a sea of rolling sand and arid desolation—stood a man, gazing out over the wild waste of dreariness, with a far-away look that proved his thoughts had flown to other scenes than those by which he was surrounded.

He was a person of splendid physique, as his scant dress plainly showed; his hair and beard were long and dark, while his skin was tanned to the hue of copper.

Scattered among the trees, having just refreshed themselves at the cool water of the spring, were a number of camels, while flocks of hardy desert sheep cropped at the grass that grew around.

It was near the sunset hour, and like a huge ball of fire the God of Day was descending beyond the desert horizon, and altogether the scene was not unpicturesque, with the lonely man there amid the dumb brutes it was his duty to care for.

In that splendidly formed man, in spite of the two long and cruel years of bondage he had undergone, in spite of his cruel sufferings and desert life, and notwithstanding his long and matted hair and beard, the reader cannot fail to recognize Launcelot Grenville.

Yes, Launcelot Grenville, the once proud, elegant man, now the slave of a Moor, the bondman of a cruel master, the keeper of desert flocks and camels, and, in rags and loneliness, a pitiable object indeed.

But the fire in his eyes was not quenched, the fearless, resolute face was still the same, though marked by lines of physical suffering and mental agony, heart-burnings and despair of hope on earth.

He had been taken to the Moorish capital, and had become the property of the kaid of the slaves, who sold him to a sheik of the desert, and far away he was dragged by his master to his home in that wilderness of sand. Home! Alas, his home was to drift with the wild tribe from place to place, to sleep upon the sands, to eat that which was thrown to him as a dog, from the savage who held his life in his hand—to tend the four-footed wealth of the Moor who had paid his gold for him, and to brood over his sorrows, and hope on for a time when he could escape from thralldom.

Suddenly far off on the desert his quick eye caught sight of a moving object, and he bent his gaze upon it.

"It is a camel, but mine are all in the oasis," he said, indifferently, glancing over the herd.

Nearer and nearer the camel drew, until it was evident that there was a rider upon its back.

Upon making this discovery, the herdsman stepped off a few paces, and returned with a long musket, which he leaned against the tree at his side.

Another glance at the coming camel showed him that another animal of like species followed in the wake of the leader, but that this one had no rider.

At a long, swinging pace the two camels came on, heading directly for the oasis, and with their heads stretched far in front, with that eager expectancy shown by these "ships of the desert" when they know that water is near.

In half an hour after being discovered, and just as the sun touched the horizon, the camels

ran into the oasis and buried their noses in the cool spring, while the rider sprung to the ground and advanced toward the herdsman, the palms of the hands turned toward him to indicate that he was friendly.

"Allah arienak,"* said the stranger quietly, and the herdsman bade him welcome.

"I seek the flocks of Abdallah Bourkih," responded the new-comer.

"His herds are here; I am their tender."

The stranger gazed straight into the face of the speaker, and said, distinctly:

"Grenville!"

The herdsman started, and the blood rushed into his face, for that name he had not heard spoken for two long years, as his master called him Mozah, which being interpreted means stranger.

Surely the man before him was a Moor, and yet, how could he know his name?

As he had learned to speak the language perfectly, during his years of bondage, Launcelot returned:

"Yes, I am Grenville; what would you?"

The Moor made no reply, but drew from his belt a small piece of paper and handed to the herdsman, who eagerly seized it, and beheld, written thereon, in a round hand, these words:

"Follow the bearer. His camels are the fleetest in the desert."

There was no signature, and the handwriting was not familiar to him; yet that the words were addressed to him there was no doubt, for the bearer of the note had pronounced his name.

"From where come you?" he asked. But here the man became non-committal, and pointed to the note, then to the camels, and then across the desert.

"I will go with you this night; no change can be for the worse, and what care I for danger?"

The Moor's face brightened, and going to his saddle, he untied a bundle attached to it and handed to the herdsman, who eagerly opened it.

Within he found two serviceable pistols, a sword, and a suit of clothing, such as was worn by the Moorish merchants, together with a sum of gold, and like trinkets to serve as the "small change" of the desert, and presents for those to whom it might be necessary to give something in the course of his journeyings.

Eagerly the white slave searched for another missive that might tell him more than he could find out from the one who had brought him hope, but nothing else was visible, and the Moor's mouth was sealed as to where he was going, or from whence he had come.

Having determined to go with the Moor, though he knew death would follow if overtaken by his master, he looked to the comfort of the camels, got together his store of dates, milked the camels, killed a sheep and made a stew of it, after which he invited his visitor to take supper with him, and a hearty meal the two ate, for Launcelot Grenville, with the hope of escape from his cruel captivity, felt his blood all afire, and really enjoyed his repast, humble as it was.

Then Launcelot set about preparing his pack-age of food to carry with them; but the Moor told him he had come well-stocked with provisions, and had more than ample for both of them. Then the two lay down to rest.

An hour after midnight, Launcelot Grenville awoke, and arousing his companion, they made preparations for an immediate departure, and were soon mounted upon their swift camels and going at a fair pace over the desert.

As the day broke they discovered a party of three horsemen coming toward them, and at a glance the herdsman recognized his master, Abdallah Bourkih, and his two brothers, who were returning from a trip to the coast.

At once he made known to his companion and guide who they were, but trusting to his disguise as a merchant, hoped to pass unrecognized by them.

With manifestations of friendship the two parties approached each other, Abdallah Bourkih and his brothers mounted upon the swift, wiry steeds of the desert.

Not to betray himself the herdsman remained silent, and the Moor did the talking, telling lies about who they were, or rather were not, as glibly as though lying was his profession.

But all the time Abdallah was eying Launcelot closely, and as the parties separated the old sheik of the desert shook his head ominously.

Hardly had a mile divided them, when glancing back the Moor saw a camel with a rider on his back dash over a sand-hill and halt by the horsemen, at the same time pointing toward the fugitives.

"It is Nessak, the son of Abdallah," said Launcelot, calmly.

"Then let us put our camels to their speed," said the Moor.

"No, let us not drive them hard until there is need; if we are pursued now, I will fight them."

"Abdallah Bourkih is a great sheik," the Moor suggested.

"I would kill the sultan did he stand between

* God be with you.

me and freedom," was the determined reply, and the Moor caressed his beard at the thought of any one offering harm to the great Sidi.

It was now evident that the camel-rider had gone to the oasis, and finding the herdsman not there, had started in pursuit, for he was gesticulating wildly, and the result was the four Moors turned on the track of the fugitives.

Launcelot quietly unslung the long musket he had brought with him, and placed his pistols ready for use, the Moor, who called himself Selim, following his example.

Like the wind the pursuers came on, and a stern resolve was on the face of Launcelot, for he remembered how cruel had been his treatment from the sheik and those with him, and for long months he had been nursing a hope of revenge upon them.

"Mezrah, son of an accursed race, stop at the command of thy master!" yelled Abdallah, when they came close enough to be heard.

"Sheik Abdallah, press me not, or I will kill you," cried Launcelot, in stern tones.

But the sheik feared not the slave who so long had been under his control, and, calling to his kinsmen to follow, he dashed on, a long pistol in his hand.

"I warn you off, Sheik Abdallah," said Launcelot, and he brought his musket round for use, and came to a halt.

The reply of the Moor was to fire at his slave. It was the last act of his life, for, as the bullet from his pistol whizzed above the head of Launcelot, the musket sprung to his shoulder, a report followed, and the Sheik Abdallah fell from his saddle, a dead man.

Instantly, with a pistol in each hand, Launcelot turned upon the others, crying to his companion:

"Shoot them down, or they will bring a hundred riders upon our track."

Selim at once obeyed; his musket flashed with the two pistols of Launcelot, and the weapons of their enemies.

But the aim of the horrified and demoralized brothers and son of Abdallah was bad, and neither of the fugitives was injured, while the dropping of their foes from their horses and camel proved that they had fired unerringly.

But the son of the sheik at once sprung to his feet, and, though wounded, threw himself on the back of his father's steed, and dashed away across the desert with the speed of a bird.

"Come, Selim; it were useless to attempt to catch him. Let us take their arms and away from here," cried Launcelot, and seizing the weapons and provisions of the dead Moors, the two men mounted their fleet camels, and at a steady, swinging gait, pressed on their way, for they well knew that Abdallah's whole tribe would be in pursuit within a few hours, when warned by the sheik's son of his father's death at the hands of his slave.

CHAPTER IX.

THE AMAZERG QUEEN.

WITHIN the heart of the range of mountains that run back from the coast, a few leagues in the interior of Morocco, dwell the Amazergs, the most warlike and intelligent of the Moorish tribes, and who, under a chief who inherits the title which descends from father to son, are the most feared of any of the wandering races of that strange land.

The retreats of the Amazergs were in the fastnesses of the wild range from which they take their name, and if other than one of their tribe ever entered their secluded homes, it was as a prisoner, for they had often, when in revolt against the sultans, beaten back the trained soldiers sent against them, and conquered their own terms with the haughty Sidi.

The best horsemen of Morocco, owning the the best and fleetest herd of desert or mountain steeds, armed literally from head to foot, and of splendid physical development, they were foes that few dared to meet, and were called both mountain lions and desert kings, for they were equally at home in scaling the lofty heights or flying across the sandy plains.

It is among this tribe that I would have my reader accompany me, and to the most pretentious of their mountain homes—a house almost modern in its build, surrounded by broad verandas, and furnished with an eye to every comfort and luxury—strange things indeed in that far region.

Half-reclining upon a silken divan out upon the cool veranda, and gazing listlessly far over the superb and grand scene spread out before her—a scene of mountain fastnesses, valleys, sparkling streams, tree-covered hills, a wide stretch of desert and the blue sea beyond—was a woman of surpassing loveliness, and scarcely over twenty-one or two.

Her form was exquisitely molded, and attired in the pretty costume worn by Moorish women, while the veil was thrown back over the silken turban.

A fortune in jewels was upon her person, a guitar lay at her side, a silver tray with fruit and coffee stood near, books were piled in confusion upon the floor, and all around indicated that she was a petted beauty, indulged in every whim.

And yet, though the face was beautiful, far

back in the dreamy eyes dwelt a look of deep sadness, as though the roses that strewed her path did not keep the thorns out of her heart, and a sigh that broke from her slightly-parted lips told that some sorrow had come upon her.

As she turned her eyes, from their wistful gaze across the sea, they fell upon two horsemen ascending the hillside toward the house, and she half sprang from the divan as she appeared to recognize one of them.

"It is Selim—yes; but the other—no, it cannot be, and yet it may be, for it has been long since I saw him. Yes, it is, it is none other! That form I can never forget," and she arose to her feet, just as the horsemen halted near and sprung to the ground, while one of them advanced quickly, gazing intently into the face of the woman.

"Captain Grenville! Free at last! Thank Heaven!" and the woman held out both hands to greet the man who advanced toward her and sprung upon the piazza.

"Maud Menken! You then are my preserver! I have guessed it," and Launcelot Grenville bent low and kissed the hand that grasped his own.

"I saved you, yes. Would to God I could have done so long ago, but," and the beautiful face flushed crimson, "I am no longer the Maud Menken you knew, Captain Grenville, for I am the wife of—"

"The Red Rais?" broke in Launcelot.

"Yes; we were married one year ago by a Spanish priest, captured on one of the prizes taken by my husband," and Maud gazed intently into the face of the man before her, as though hoping to see it clouded with sorrow; but no change crossed the countenance of Launcelot Grenville at the news he heard, and he said, quietly:

"Tell me more of yourself; but first, let me congratulate you upon your escape from the harem of the sultan."

"Thank Heaven I escaped that dishonor! Nay, I would have died by my own hand, when hope had entirely left me; but El Rais is at heart a noble man, and that he truly loves me, I know, for he has proven it.

"Unable to save me, openly, from the fate for which I was intended, he arranged that his mountain horseman should kidnap me that night when we camped, and I was brought hither."

"The Sidi fumed at the loss of a victim, of course, but it was said the desert robbers had stolen me, and he attached no blame to El Rais, who kept it a deep secret that I was here."

"You, it was said, were killed in the attack upon the camp, and bitterly I mourned for you, and so did El Rais, for it was his intention to have purchased you, and in the end to give you your freedom."

"A week after my coming here, El Rais arrived, and frankly told me of his love for me, begging me to become his wife."

"I asked for a year to consider, told him that I was cast down in grief for the death of my father and yourself, and he gladly gave me the promise that I should go free at the end of that time, if I did not then love him."

"But, during those twelve months he proved himself so noble, and in so many little ways showed his true manhood, that from admiration, my regard turned to respect and love, and he yielded to my wish to have a priest unite us, and one year I have been his wife and the Queen of the Amazergs, and, though I am not happy in this land of the Moors, I am at least at peace."

"I believe that you have acted wisely, Maud, and I hope every happiness may ever attend you. I will never forget that you saved me from a fate more cruel than death," and Launcelot Grenville shuddered at the thought of his long captivity.

"Let me tell you about that; a few months ago El Rais was called to see the sultan, and while in the city learned in some way that you had not been killed, as we believed, but were sold into slavery to a sheik of the desert, Abdlallah Bourkih, and I immediately determined to send a trusty messenger to see if he could find you, and you know not how happy I am that you are once more free. How you must have suffered, you only can tell."

"It seems like a long, horrible dream to me now; but, God forever bless you, fair Queen of the Amazergs, for awaking me from the hideous nightmare. But the Rais—where is he?"

"He returns to-night, and will be delighted to see you, for he has spoken of making you, should Selim return successful from his search, a *Bash Soto Rais** of his new vessel, which the sultan had built for him, and which he does not intend to command, as he will leave the sea, and dwell here among his people."

"I am homeless and hopeless, fair queen, but I do not think I could accept the offer."

"You could do much good by so doing, as Mesurah Rais, the man whom the Sidi has appointed to command her in place of El Rais, is a monster inhuman, and woe be to the poor captives whom he takes!"

Launcelot Grenville seemed deeply moved by the words of the Amazerg queen. She had be-

* Lieutenant-in-chief.

come a Moor by adoption; why should not he, especially when it was in his power to do much good as an officer?

A corsair he must be, it was true, and yet he was becoming reckless as to what Fate made of him, and he said, after an instant's deliberation:

"If El Rais makes me *Bash Soto Rais*, I will accept it, come what may, for I am but the football of Fate."

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERIOUS PILOT.

CREeping along the Morocco coast, and close in land, was a long, narrow-hulled, lateen-rigged craft, that had a look in its whole *tout ensemble* that would have caused an honest craft to give it a wide berth.

The hull, that seemed to crouch upon the water, was pierced for six guns to a broadside, and mounted three pivot long thirty-twos, forward, aft and amidships, which could be worked to fire both starboard and port.

The sails were of enormous size for the tonnage of the craft, and that she was fast in a remarkable degree was demonstrated by the fact that she was making four knots out of a two-knot breeze.

Upon the decks were fully a hundred and fifty men, a wild, cruel-looking set of fellows, who would have enjoyed throat-cutting as a sport.

Aft were several officers pacing to and fro, smoking and chatting, and, with one exception, wearing the reckless, cruel look of the men.

At the peak of the main lateen-yard floated the flag of the Moor, while at the fore-yard peak was a black flag with a red cimeter in the center.

Suddenly the officer, before referred to as not being as cruel-visaged as his companions, sprung to the helm and put it hard down, while his deep voice aroused every man to action.

The cause of this move, which headed the craft at once for the shore, was evident now to all, for around a rocky cliff, not half a mile away, came the sharp bow and tall spars, crowded with canvas, of a sloop-of-war.

As the stranger forged out beyond the point, a scene of excitement was visible upon her decks, and the roll of the drum beating to quarters was distinctly heard, for the Moor was now evidently seen by every eye on the sloop.

Without an order, and accustomed to daily and nightly combats, the Moors had at once sprung to their guns, and in an instant the corsair was stripped for action, should it be forced upon her; but as the stranger was double her size it would be madness to fight, except as a last resort, and surrender meant treatment as pirates.

The officer who had first discovered the strange vessel, and had put the corsair for the shore, turned his glass calmly upon the sloop and gazed for some time attentively at the flag, which, when the wind raised its folds, proved to be the stars and stripes.

Luffing up, so as to bring her broadside to bear, the American poured in a hot fire upon the flying corsair as her guns came in range, but except a splintered bulwark and several shots through the sails, no damage was done.

To the surprise evidently of the corsairs, and also doubtless of the Americans, the officer who commanded the Moorish vessel gave no order to return the fire, only stood on toward the coast with all the speed that could be gotten out of the light wind.

Upon the deck of the American all was excitement, for they were anxious to capture the Moor, whose black flag, with red sword in the center, proved it to be the vessel commanded by the sea monster known as Mesurah Rais, who had hitherto escaped every attempt at capture or destruction.

"Captain Brainard, there is no opening in yonder drift that I can see, and yet he heads directly for the coast," said a sad-faced, handsome young lieutenant to his commander who stood near him upon the quarter-deck of the sloop.

"He doubtless sees that with this wind, and hemmed in as he is, escape is impossible, and intends running his floating hell on shore, Grenville," said Captain Brainard.

"I believe after all there is some opening yonder," said Lieutenant Arthur Grenville, who still kept his glass to his eye.

"Then give him another broadside, though I hate to cut up the pretty vessel."

"Ay, ay, sir," and giving the order the sloop again luffed, and once more a broadside was poured upon the flying corsair, and this time it was evident that a number of the crew suffered.

But the corsair held on her course in silence, not materially damaged by the fire of the American.

"It is strange the pirate does not return our shots; he is getting merciful," said Captain Brainard.

"I cannot account for it, sir. Ah, see there; he has a hole to run into."

As Arthur Grenville pointed to the corsair craft, the long, sharp bowsprit and head-sails suddenly disappeared from sight, going, so it looked from the sloop, as if they had

face of the cliff, and a moment after the graceful hull and clouds of canvas had vanished.

"It is too bad! Stand on as we are, and then I will lay to and let you pursue in the boats, Grenville, for we must take that fellow if possible," said Captain Brainard, and, after approaching as near the coast as he dared, the sloop was brought to, and the boats lowered and filled with men.

"Do not be rash, Grenville, and if I wish to recall you, I will fire a gun," and Captain Brainard watched the boats row away, and saw them disappear, as had the corsair, in the very face of the cliff.

An hour passed away, and Captain Brainard grew restless, for no sound of combat had come to his ears, the wind had died away, and he was forced to drop an anchor to keep from drifting upon the rock coast.

Then night was coming on, and far up in the skies clouds were skurrying along with lightning speed while all below was calm.

"Curse the Moor! I believe he has led us into a trap, and if a storm comes on from seaward we are likely to drive ashore. I wonder what has become of Grenville?"

Thus another hour passed, and the indications of a storm becoming more decided, and night at hand, Captain Brainard gave the signal to recall the boats.

The deep boom of the heavy gun broke the calm, and echoed with ominous roar far along the rocky, inhospitable shores, until it died away in the distance; but moments passed away and yet no sign of the returning boats.

"Fire another gun, Mr. Armstrong, and keep them up, for I don't like our present situation at all. We have no wind to put to sea with, no boats to tow us off shore, and two-thirds of the crew gone," said Captain Brainard, pacing anxiously to and fro.

Again and again the signal-gun was fired, and night settled down, shutting out the land from view, still the boats did not return.

At length, however, the sound of oars was heard, and the look-out hailed:

"Boat, ahoy! What boats are those?"

"Ay, ay, all right!"

The answer was in the well-known voice of Arthur Grenville, and Captain Brainard felt a great weight removed from his heart.

"Well, Arthur?" he exclaimed, meeting his lieutenant at the gangway.

"We meet with no success, sir, and could find no trace of the corsair, although I searched every inlet and basin. Where she can have gone is a mystery to all of us, and I was unwilling to give up the hope of finding him as long as there was light."

"I am sorry he has escaped us, and more sorry that we are caught here. There is a hurricane brewing, you see?"

"Yes, sir; but we could not see it from where we were inshore. Do you know, I believe the men think the corsair was a phantom craft, for he never returned our fire, and his disappearance certainly was magical."

"He has some haunt inshore, Grenville."

"True, sir, but to find it was impossible."

"Let him go for the present, and let us look to our own safety. See, the ocean is getting restless, and we have not wind enough to move."

"I do not like our position. Suppose we tow out to an offing."

"Impossible; the tide sets in so strong, and now the swell, that I was forced to drop both anchors."

"They'll not hold her, sir, in a blow."

"True, and if we cannot beat out, we will be lost."

The prospect of the sloop was anything but cheering, as the roar of the coming storm grew louder each moment, and was driving landward, while the coast was not a third of a mile away.

"Sloop-of-war ahoy!"

The deep voice startled all on board the vessel, and caused many of the superstitious sailors to crouch with fear, coming as did the hail from out the pitchy darkness landward.

At first it was believed that the corsair was upon them, but no sail was visible upon the waters.

"Ay, ay! Who hails?" called out Arthur Grenville.

"One who would serve you," was the reply.

"Ay, ay! Come alongside," answered Arthur Grenville.

Immediately out of the gloom was visible a small dark object coming toward the vessel, and an instant after a boat ran under the sloop's lee, and a tall form nimbly sprang over the bulwarks and confronted Captain Brainard and his officers.

He was attired in the uniform of an officer of the Moorish piratical navy, and the battle-lantern rays caused the jewels he wore, and his gem-bitted sword and pistols, to glitter like sparks of fire.

Six feet in height, broad-shouldered, as straight as an arrow, and with long, flowing beard and hair, he was a striking looking man, and the officers and seamen of the vessel-of-war gazed upon him with a certain respect mingled with awe.

Arthur Grenville spoke in the little boat to Captain Brainard and a few men in French.

"One of our African hurricanes is brewing, monsieur, and your vessel is in deadly peril."

"None know that fact, sir, better than we do ourselves; but how are we to remedy the evil?"

"It was for that I sought you."

"May I ask whom I have the honor of addressing?" said Captain Brainard, politely, struck with the appearance and manner of the man before him.

"It matters not, monsieur, what my name is—my rank is lieutenant in the Moorish navy, and, as Mesurah Rais is wounded, I at present command the craft you fired upon this afternoon."

"Ha! a confessed corsair! This is bold in you."

"Call me corsair if it please you, monsieur, but there is an old saying that Satan is not as black as he is painted, and I came on board of your vessel to save it from destruction," calmly said the strange man.

"What motive have you in so doing, when you know that we would hang you and your crew to the yard-arm if we captured you?"

"It is catching before hanging, monsieur; but my motive was humanity."

"Humanity in a Moorish corsair!" almost sneered Captain Brainard.

"A strange circumstance, I admit, sir; but while we waste words, your vessel is slowly driving ashore."

Captain Brainard seemed in a quandary; the man before him appeared honest in his intention of serving him, yet it was a remarkable case for a Moor and a corsair to be guilty of an act of humanity, and turning to Arthur Grenville he asked:

"What shall we do, Arthur?"

"If he leads us into a trap, sir, it cannot place us in a worse position than we are now," said Arthur Grenville, speaking, as had his commander, in English, and seemingly forgetting that their strange visitor had hailed them in that language.

"Here, gentlemen," and the Moor spoke in perfect English, "you will have to meet the mad elements, and I feel assured that when the storm strikes you it will be impossible to beat out against it, and you will be driven ashore."

"If I lead you into a trap, as you seem to fear, it can only be against my own crew, which you greatly outnumber, and you have arms and are men."

"I will trust you, sir. Where would you carry the vessel?" said Captain Brainard.

"To a basin inshore where she can anchor in safety, and from whence you can tow out to sea in the morning, should you not have a land-breeze to carry you out?"

"And your vessel lies inshore now?"

"It does, sir."

"And you do not expect a pledge from me not to attack you in the morning?"

The Moor smiled and answered:

"You are at liberty to attack us whenever you find us, sir; your boats failed to discover my vessel, although in hailing distance of her. The wind is coming, sir, and the storm will soon break. Shall I take command of the sloop?"

"Yes; but it certainly is a startling sight to see a Moorish corsair commanding an American sloop-of-war."

In a voice that sent the men flying to their posts the Moor gave the order to hoist the anchors, and to set what sail was needed, and calling the two oarsmen from his boat alongside to take the helm, he went forward and stood on the fore-castle as the vessel swung round and headed landward under the strong pressure of the breeze that was the precursor of the storm.

In a voice distinctly audible to all on the quarter-deck, but in the Moorish language, he gave his orders to his men to port and starboard the helm, as the case might be, and the splendid vessel soon swept in a narrow gorge between overhanging cliffs, just as the howling hurricane struck the shore with a force that was terrific, and hurled volumes of water high upon the rocks.

But the sails had been quickly taken in and furled, the anchors let fall, and all put ship-shape to meet the wild rush of the elements, and beneath the lee of the lofty cliff the staunch vessel hardly swerved under the shock, and rode in safety at anchor.

Quickly, as the Moor advanced, did Captain Brainard step forward and grasp his hand.

"I owe you the life of every man on board my vessel, sir, for we would have been swamped in an instant. I never beheld such a hurricane."

"We were just in time, sir. In the morning, if you wish to look up my vessel, do not allow the service I have rendered you to prevent. Farewell, Captain Brainard," and the mysterious pilot spoke with a strange sadness in his tones.

"Stay! You must in some way let me return your noble services, sir."

"In no way whatever. Good-by, Lieutenant Grenville. Gentlemen, good-night," and the

Moor again turned to depart, but Captain Brainard stepped forward.

"One word, sir. You are not a Moor?"

"I am an unfortunate outcast in the Moorish service," and the pilot sprang over the side into the waiting boat and was quickly rowed away, while behind him he left many hearts that beat in sympathy for his misfortunes.

A rapid row of half a dozen cable-lengths and the little boat, which was tossed wildly about upon the rough waters of the little basin, turned into a narrow passageway, a gorge in the cliff, hardly thirty feet in width.

A dozen lengths of the boat they came to what appeared to be a rocky wall; but the oarsmen dropped their oars and the apparent wall was easily raised, for it was only a canvas curtain hung between the cliffs, and presenting the appearance at a short distance, even in daylight, of being solid rock.

Just within this curtained recess lay the corsair vessel, her stern crowded with cannon that commanded the entrance.

"When the hurricane blows over I will put to sea," said the Moor to one of his officers, as he stepped on the deck of his vessel.

"Yes, oh Rais," replied the officer, with respect, while his superior passed on into the cabin.

There a scene of wondrous magnificence met the eye, for the cabin was lighted by swinging silver lamps, and around in profusion were luxurious ottomans and divans, while velvet rugs covered the floor.

Paintings of the rarest kinds, jewel-studded weapons, and innumerable costly trinkets lined the cabin walls, and upon the cabin table were vases of gold and a tea-service of solid silver.

But none of these did the Moor notice, as with clouded brow and set lips he paced the floor, kicking aside the velvet cushions that obstructed his way.

"How different are our fates! Arthur an honored officer in the service of his country—I, a Moor—faithless to my land, my race and my creed—a wretched outcast—a corsair! Oh, God of the Christian and Allah of the Mahomedan, have mercy upon me!"

With a groan of anguish, wrung from his inmost heart, he sunk down upon a silken divan and buried his face in his hands.

For hours he never moved, and one would have believed him dead, so statue-like he appeared; then the voice of an officer aroused him.

"Ah, Rais, the hurricane has gone by."

Quickly he sprang to his feet and ascended to the deck, where he gave orders to draw out of the rocky pier, and stand out to sea.

Half an hour after the watch on board the American sloop-of-war startled all on deck with the cry:

"A phantom ship! a phantom ship!"

"Silence, you idiot! it is the Moorish corsair standing out to sea."

It was Arthur Grenville who spoke, for he was officer of the deck, and, as a junior lieutenant excitedly called the men to quarters, he continued, in stern tones:

"Hold! That craft goes free, for I shall give no order to fire upon it!"

The men shrunk back, and the Moor swept on past the American, not two cable-lengths distant, and stood out into the rough and dark waters beyond.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CORSAIR'S CAPTIVE.

A SEA-CHASE at night! With the strong wind sending the vessel nimbly along, and the bright flash of the stern guns of the pursued, followed by the deep boom and whiz of shot, answered by the red glare of the bow-guns of the pursuer, their basso roar, and the crashing of timbers and shrieks of anguish, as the iron messengers tore through the wood and flesh.

Fast fled the pursued, faster came the pursuer, until but a half-mile divided them, and it was evident that the roar of cannon must ere long be followed by the rattle of small-arms and clash of steel, when the boarders were called upon to spring upon their prey.

The leading vessel was a large craft, a good sailer, and possessing a fair armament and large crew; but upon her wake hung an ocean bloodhound—a corsair, low in hull, sending clouds of white canvas above her decks, gaunt, rapid, merciless, and with a crew of fiends incarnate once they tasted blood.

Anxious faces were upon the leading vessel, and hands nervously clutched their weapons.

Eager faces were upon the corsair, and hands already red with blood, firmly held their weapons, hoping soon to drive them home in the mad conflict.

Nearer and nearer crept the hound of the sea upon its prey, until the sharp nose of the corsair hung over the stern of the other vessel, which still held on its way.

Then the long bowsprit grated against the taffrail of the flying craft, and into the dense crowd formed to repel boarders the corsairs hurled themselves, the two vessels were lashed together, and the hand-to-hand fight had begun in earnest.

Bravely did the assailed strike back at their

assailants, and desperately did they struggle to save their vessel, and soons fell upon each other; but they fought a crew of devils in human shape that knew not defeat, and ere long the combat turned into butchery, until the defeated crew fled in terror below decks.

Then the blood-drunk crew dispersed to take possession of their dearly-won prize, and yells of delight went up from hoarse throats, as the cry arose that they had captured a Persian treasure-ship—nay, more, there was a Princess of Persia on board, a maiden of seventeen, beautiful beyond a mortal's dream of beauty, who, with her retinue was en route to Constantinople, where she was to become the bride of the sultan's favorite son.

Her courtiers, maids-in-waiting, slaves, with princely presents of gold, silver and precious stones, were all on board, and had fallen a prize to the cruel monster, Mesurah Rais, the Moorish corsair.

Frenzied with delight at the wealth he had won, and intoxicated by the beauty of Zulah the princess, Mesurah Rais dragged her from the cabin, and reared her in his blood-stained arms to bear her to his own vessel.

In piteous cries the maiden appealed for aid from those around her, and—it came!

A Moorish officer suddenly confronted his chief, a drawn cimeter in his hand.

"Release that lady, Rais, or, by Allah, I will cut you down!"

There was a ring in the words that was intensely in earnest, and a flash in the burning eyes that knew no fear, and Mesurah Rais halted suddenly, glanced around him amid a silence like death, and then cried in trumpet tones:

"Hurl that dog into the sea!"

But not a man moved to obey, and wild with fury, Mesurah Rais dropped the maiden from his arms, drew his blood-stained cimeter and sprang upon the man before him with the cry such as a wounded tiger might give.

But his weapon was met with steel as true as his own, and instantly a desperate combat was begun, Moors and Persians alike gathering around and gazing upon the dread scene.

Short, terrible and deadly was the battle, and then Mesurah Rais fell dead upon his deck, cut down by the cimeter of his *Bash Soto Rais*.

Yet the battle was not ended here, for there were red fiends on board who sprang forward to avenge their captain, and others who sided with their lieutenant, and at once the decks of the Persian vessel became again a scene of desperate struggle for life and death.

But, urged on by their gallant leader, the weaker party won the deck, and the followers of Mesurah Rais cried lustily to their comrades for mercy. *Launcelot Grenville was victor!*

Crouched down by the bulwarks, surrounded by a few of her followers, Zulah the princess had been a horrified witness of the whole wild scene; but what would be the result to her she could not tell, for might not the lieutenant have slain his chief that he might himself gain the prize?

Still, as Launcelot Grenville approached her she did not recoil from him, as she had done from Mesurah Rais.

"Lady, your vessel is sinking, and I must remove you and your treasure to my decks; otherwise you might go on your way, as I will not war against a woman."

With a cry of joy the princess seized the hand of the Rais and covered it with kisses, while she thanked him over and over again in ardent tones, and accompanied him most willingly to the cabin of the corsair vessel.

Making her comfortable, and seeing that her attendants were around her, Launcelot Grenville ascended to the deck, and the treasure was quickly transferred to his own craft, and not a moment too soon, as the shot-torn Persian vessel went down as soon as cut loose from the corsair.

It was the intention of the self-appointed Rais to carry the princess in safety back to her port of departure again, and set sail for that purpose; but severe storms blew the corsair far from her course, and it was weeks before an opportunity offered of carrying out his intention, and then an obstacle arose in the way that neither himself nor Zulah cared to set aside, for his interest in the beautiful girl had deepened into love, while, from the moment she became his captive, her heart went out to the handsome Rais, and she idolized him with all the abandon of her nature.

She had been destined for the bride of another, a man she had never seen, and, with the fatalist ideas of the Eastern races, had submitted to her destiny without a word.

But now her heart was not her own, and it was no wonder that she begged earnestly not to be given up to another, nor is it strange that the Rais yielded, for he saw in the love of the beautiful girl at least an atom of joy for him in the future, and he had been so drifting upon breakers in the past that he longed to seek a haven of rest, with one fond heart to love him.

Quickly was his determination taken. The old Persian priest should perform the ceremony that would make Zulah his bride; her followers he would restore to their native land, and then

with his beautiful bride, he would seek a home in the Amazerg hills with his friends, the mountain prince and Maud, where he would endeavor to forget the past and its bitter memories.

Mais, l'homme propose, et Dieu dispose.

CHAPTER XII.

TRACKED BY FATE.

IN the same mountain home which the reader has before visited, some months after the capture of the Persian vessel by Mesurah Rais, sat three persons, all of whom have before figured in the scenes of this story.

Two of them were females, one of them Maud Menken that was, but now the Queen of the Amazergs, as she was called, and the other was Zulah, the princess, now the wife of Launcelot Grenville, who sat by her side, and upon whose face a look of contentment seemed at last to have fallen.

True to his word, Launcelot Grenville had sailed to Jaffa, the port of entry to Jerusalem, and from thence sent the attendants of Zulah by caravan back to Ispahan, Persia, the princess writing a letter to her father, the shah, giving an account of her capture, and her present happiness, and her husband sending to his royal father-in-law numerous costly presents taken from the priceless stores of Mesurah Rais.

Launcelot also sent the shah the value of the ship he had captured, in gold, but kept the dowry of his bride, as it would be an insult to return that princely treasure which went as part and parcel of the princess.

But two of Zulah's attendants, a huge Abyssinian slave, almost a giant, and her old nurse, refused to return to Persia, and both Launcelot and his lovely wife willingly consented that they should remain with them.

Having bid farewell to the Persians, the Rais set sail for the Morocco stronghold, and running in at night, dropped anchor and started at once for the retreat in the Amazerg hills, where he hoped to make his home.

Several days after the arrival of the corsair vessel in port, El Rais Aboukah received a command from the Sidi to come at once to Mequinez to present himself before him.

With reluctance he obeyed, for heads rolled off too easily in those days in Morocco, for him to care to place his in danger of the Sidi's angry arm, and he expected that he had in some way learned that Maud was kept from the imperial harem to become his wife.

But a refusal to obey the summons would have been open revolt, so El Rais Aboukah went to Mequinez, though he took the precaution to go attended by a thousand of his horse-men, under the pretense of doing honor to his ruler.

For days he was absent, and Maud, who now loved her liege lord devotedly, was becoming most anxious regarding him, when he was descried riding slowly up the hill toward the house.

He greeted his wife affectionately, and Launcelot and his bride most kindly, though all noticed that he wore a troubled look.

After refreshments had been served, the Amazerg chief said, quietly, addressing Launcelot:

"Rais, I regret to say there is trouble and danger ahead for you, as the Sidi knows of your capture of the Persian vessel, and taking the Princess Zulah for your own prize."

"Does he know that we are with you?" calmly asked Launcelot, while both Maud and Zulah turned pale.

"No, he is aware that you landed, for if you remember, Mesurah Rais, when sent to take command in my stead, brought with him from Mequinez some of the crew of his old ship, and therefore all you had under you were not Amazerg Moors."

"Those men of Mequinez deserted the vessel, it seems, the night she entered the port, and made known to the Sidi, for they went to the capital, all that you had done, and he sent for me immediately."

"And you have orders concerning me?"

"Yes; the Sidi ordered that I send you at once under guard to Mequinez, and your wife is to accompany you."

"And your answer?" asked Launcelot, carelessly.

"Of course I told him that I would do so, and I must keep my word to the Sidi, or there will be war between us, and though I can keep his troops at bay in my mountains, I do not wish a struggle with him."

"Aboukah!"

It was Maud that spoke, and she looked reproachfully at her husband, while Zulah became livid with fear.

As for Launcelot, he smiled grimly, and said:

"You know your duty best, Rais."

"Yes, and I must do as I am told, yet I see no reason why you should reach Mequinez, even if you start for there."

"Ah!" said Launcelot, while both Maud and Zulah gave a sigh of relief.

"There is a brig," continued El Rais, "lying in my harbor, that was captured by Mesurah Rais some time ago, and, as she is English built, and a staunch and fast little craft, the Sidi

wishes it for his own use, and ordered me to send it at once to him."

"I suggested that it would be a good way to send the prisoners, meaning yourselves, and he agreed with me, and I was to place you under arrest, wherever I found you, and dispatch you at once to the Mequinez harbor."

"This will be the only way I can save you, for you would be beheaded, Rais, ten minutes after your arrival in Mequinez, and what would become of the Princess Zulah, Allah only knows."

"It will be taking desperate chances to attempt to seize the brig from her crew," said Launcelot.

"No, for I will take care to send a crew formed from galley slaves, and a few men whom you can trust and whom I will instruct as to their duties."

"When you are in possession of the brig, you can land my men on the coast, and then head for any point you may wish to go, and if the brig does not reach the harbor of the Sidi, and his prisoners escape, it is not my fault."

"El Rais, you are a noble man, and I thank you."

"I had hoped to dwell near you for the remainder of my days, but there seems no rest for me, and I shall have to seek another land. So be it! When shall we start?"

"As soon as the brig can be made ready. I have already sent word to the Rais of the stronghold to have it in readiness, for I determined upon that as the only course to take to save you, and though I hate to part with you, I feel that it cannot be otherwise."

Until a late hour in the night the four friends talked over their parting and plans for the future, and after sunset of the following day they started for the harbor of the stronghold, a guard around the prisoners, for to carry out the farce of obeying the Sidi, El Rais Aboukah held Launcelot and his wife as captives.

In the pleasant little cabin of the trim brig sad farewells were spoken, and the fleet vessel was soon flying seaward under command of a young *Bash Soto Rais*, a cousin of the Rais el Rais of the Amazergs.

Shortly after midnight Launcelot Grenville went on deck, and passed along the sides, unlocking quietly the chains that bound the galley slaves to the sweeps, which the men were using, as there was very little wind.

Instantly a short struggle followed on the deck; there were a few shots, clashing of steel, shouts of the combatants, and the brig was in the possession of Launcelot Grenville, while the young Soto Rais was a prisoner, yet, being in the plot, was not anxious regarding his fate, and those only of the crew who could not be trusted with the secret, had fallen in the struggle for mastery.

Placing those that had been slaves, and who were mostly Europeans, in charge of the brig, and assuming command, Launcelot headed for the coast of Morocco, still using the sweeps, for all Moorish and Algerine corsairs at that time always rigged heavy oars upon their vessels, to use in case of calms, or to aid in chase or flight, while, at the same time, it gave employment to the captives.

Upon a lonely part of the coast the *Soto Rais* and all others of the crew, excepting the Europeans, were put on shore, and the brig headed seaward, it being the intention of Launcelot to return once more to Mexico, and offer his vessel and services to that country.

But, hardly had the land of Morocco been dropped from sight astern, when a large sail was sighted, which, at a glance, Launcelot Grenville recognized as one of the swiftest Moorish corsairs afloat, and under command of a devil in human form, and one in high favor with the Sidi.

To fly from the corsair, swift as was the brig, would be useless, and to fight him would be madness, as Launcelot did not have more than thirty men, all told, and but six small guns.

He therefore had but one course to pursue, and that was to boldly keep on his course, await until the corsair came up and hailed him, and then tell him that he had been placed in command of the brig by El Rais, and was going on a mission that was secret.

The commander of the corsair he had several times met, when a lieutenant under Mesurah Rais, and he trusted to his presence of mind to get him out of the scrape, and instructed his crew to say that they knew nothing of where they were going.

In the meantime, the corsair vessel was running down upon the brig with all sail set, and within half an hour the fate of Launcelot Grenville and his bride would be decided.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE JAWS OF DEATH.

UNDER easy canvas the brig stood on her way, while the crew, lately released from a long and cruel bondage among the Moors, were white with dread, fearing that they would be dragged back to Morocco and put to death for their mutiny.

Pacing the deck, Launcelot Grenville was perfectly calm, and his face showed no sign of dread at the ordeal he must soon pass through,

while in the cabin sat poor Zulah and her old nurse, their countenances the picture of woe, for they trembled for the result.

Nearer and nearer came the corsair, until up to the peaks of his lateen sails went the Moorish ensign and black flag, while a gun was fired across the brig's bow.

Instantly Launcelot had the flag of Morocco run up to the peak, and the black flag with its red cimier raised to the fore top, while he brought his vessel to and quietly awaited further action on the part of the Moor.

That the corsair was surprised at the colors shown on the brig, was evident, as had he been, also, that the English-built craft made no effort to escape from him, or to change her course.

The flag at the fore he recognized as the fleet ensign of the Rais el Rais, and he accordingly saluted and signified by signal that he would come on board.

This Launcelot regretted, as he had hoped to be called on board the corsair, and thereby prevent curious eyes from discovering that his crew was not composed of Moors; but having determined to brave it out, he made preparations to receive the corsair as became his rank, and one in favor with the Sidi.

Rais El Selik soon boarded the brig and was met at the gangway by Launcelot, who conducted him to the cabin, the Moor glancing suspiciously at the small crew of the fugitive vessel.

Placing before his visitor some of the red wine of Morocco, and a hookah of perfumed tobacco, with fruits and refreshments of a more solid nature, Launcelot bade him welcome as one of the favorite captains of his Sidi.

El Selik drank much, and ate with considerable gusto, still he seemed preoccupied, and at last asked:

"Where bound, lieutenant of the great Rais el Rais?"

"I am on secret service, oh skimmer of the seas," was the calm reply.

"There is no service so secret, but that the favored Rais of the Sidi, to whom Allah give many years, can know," was the pompous response.

"Let him seek of the great chief of sea and land, the Rais el Rais, what service he has sent his servant upon," said Launcelot.

"Your crew are Christian dogs," was the next remark of the suspicious El Selik.

"The Rais speaks true; they are Christian dogs," was the cautious answer.

"Where are the Moors, the true believers, that the Bash Soto Rais goes to sea with hounds of an accursed race to man his ship?"

"Let the favorite of the mighty Sidi, whom Allah preserve, ask that question also of the Captain of Captains, and not of his servant."

It was evident that El Selik suspected treachery of some kind, and he looked Launcelot straight in the eyes, but the look was fearlessly returned, and the favorite of the Sidi was in more danger than he imagined, for his host had suddenly determined upon a plan should he not be permitted to go on his way unmolested.

"I have him in my power, and he shall become a hostage," thought Launcelot; but his face showed no sign of what was passing in his mind.

Suddenly El Selik gave a start—his eyes had rested upon the beautiful face of Zulah, peering anxiously into the cabin.

"The Soto Rais has a fair captive; is she to go to the harem of his mighty Sidi, whom Allah bless?"

Launcelot, though he had not seen Zulah, knew that El Selik had caught a glimpse of her, and he said, calmly:

"The captive is a princess of Persia. She was captured in the Mediterranean some time ago by Mesurah Rais, my captain, and the Rais El Selik, being a favorite of his Sidi, whom Allah preserve, I will tell him that I bear the beautiful Lady Zulah to her home."

"If the Soto Rais was a Moor I would believe his words, for the Shah of Persia would pay a great ransom for the return of his daughter; but I will have to carry this vessel back with me to Mequinez, and see if thy words are true."

Launcelot made no immediate reply, and his face did not change color, or a muscle quiver, as the Rais looked him searchingly in the face.

"After an instant's pause Launcelot said:

"The Rais will not do this, assuredly!"

"I will."

"It will anger the great chief, Rais el Rais."

"So be it."

"Then upon your head be it."

"Upon my head be it."

Seeing that El Selik was decided, Launcelot looked down to grasp his pistol and make him a prisoner, when his eye fell upon the signet-ring of the Rais el Rais—the one he had given him years before, when chased by the Hornet and English sloop-of-war, and which he had kept through his years of slavery to an Arab master, hiding it among his rags.

Now the diamond's glitter caught his eye, and drawing it from his finger he said, calmly, as he handed it to El Selik:

"Would I be intrusted with this were I not a true Moor?"

El Selik glanced at the ring, read the inscription, and handed it back, saying, in a tone of respect:

"I honor the pledge of the Red Rais. The ways of Allah are strange indeed."

The dark, somber eyes of Launcelot Grenville flashed, yet he spoke not a word, and El Selik arose to go, now fully convinced that he had made a grave mistake in suspecting the Soto Rais of treachery.

As the two left the cabin one of those incongruities of human nature, a man who would sell his soul and his kindred for gold, a dark-skinned Spaniard, said a few words to El Selik in a low tone.

Instantly the Rais turned upon Launcelot; but he had also heard the words of the treacherous seaman, and his pistol-muzzle touched the heart of El Selik.

"Not one word, Moor, and return into the cabin, or I will kill you, by Allah!"

The Moor saw his danger, and, a dear lover of life, he slunk back into the cabin, while Launcelot, calling to an officer to secure the traitor, followed close upon the prisoner's heels.

"That man's words have betrayed me; but, Rais, if you value your life you will do what I say," and the voice of Launcelot Grenville was deep and stern, and the pistol pointed directly at the head of El Selik, who had turned a livid hue.

"Dog of a Christian, you shall suffer for this," growled the Moor, savagely.

"You are in no condition to make threats, Rais El Selik, and I am the one to dictate terms."

"From here to the Azore Islands is just ten leagues, and I will stand on and land you there at St. Michael's, where you can order your vessel to come on the day after to-morrow, for you can easily run out to meet her in a fisherman's boat."

"Beard of my grandfather! would you spit on me?" yelled El Selik.

"I will kill you if you do not do as I wish. Hold! raise your voice above an ordinary tone, and I will shoot you through the heart."

"I will call my Moors to come to my aid," boldly said El Selik, but he kept his eye on the pistol.

"They will find you a dead man, and before I would go back to Morocco as a prisoner, I would blow this brig and all in it to atoms. I tell you, Rais, you are standing on a magazine, so send word to your Bash Soto Rais that you are going in this vessel to the Azores and to come there for you."

"He will believe there is treachery," said El Selik, willing to yield to the demand of his captor if he could thereby save his life.

"Send the ring you wear. I will summon one of your boat's crew to you here; but he shall die, and you, too, if you give a hint that you are a prisoner. Quick! what is your decision?"

"By Allah! I have to obey," meekly said the Moor.

"Zulah!"

At being called the young wife entered the cabin.

"Send your Abyssinian slave, and two men to me here."

Zulah left the cabin, and in a moment thereafter the giant negro and two seamen entered.

"Men, take your stands just behind yonder curtain, and if I give you a signal, kill this man."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the men, one of whom was Scotch and the other Irish.

Turning to the slave, Launcelot said:

"Go to the boat alongside and bid the officer in charge to come to the cabin; the Rais would speak with him; and mind you, slave, stand behind the one you lead hither, and if the Rais makes any sign to him, drive your knife to his heart."

The slave bent low in respectful salutation and left the cabin, while the two seamen, armed with pistols, took their stand behind a curtain that divided off a state-room from the cabin.

"Rais El Selik, you see I am master here. Simply give your orders to your officer, to meet you off St. Michael's the second night from this."

The Rais gritted his teeth savagely, but though a monster to those in his power, he was an arrant coward at heart, and, though swearing vengeance against Launcelot Grenville, felt his inability to then do other than obey.

The next moment a heavy step was heard, and the Abyssinian entered with a handsome young Moor, an under officer of the corsair vessel.

He saluted his Rais politely, and then Launcelot, after which he stood in silence awaiting for his commander to speak.

It was a moment of intense peril to all on board the brig; but Launcelot Grenville's face was perfectly serene, yet there was an expression in his eyes, which El Selik understood, and he said, hoarsely:

"Veldak, tell my Bash Soto Rais to come to the Azores after me."

The Rais hesitated, and the young Moor looked surprised; but catching the eye of Launcelot Grenville, El Selik continued:

"I will be off St. Michael's the second night from this; await me there."

The officer bowed and started to retire, when Launcelot Grenville, in a perfectly composed manner, filled a silver goblet with wine and handed it to him, and wished him pleasantly much joy in life.

Unconscious of the danger he was in the young Moor left the cabin and El Selik was alone with his captor, who coolly invited him to come on deck with him.

There was nothing for the Rais but to obey, and he witnessed the brig get under way and head for the Azores, while his own vessel stood off on another tack, as it was not to be at the appointed rendezvous for nearly forty-eight hours.

Although he had most cleverly escaped a capture, which would have resulted in certain death, Launcelot Grenville was determined to make an example of the seaman who had proven traitor, believing that he could thereby win a name and gold for himself among the Moors, who had held him in slavery for long years.

As soon as a few leagues separated the brig from the corsair vessel, Launcelot Grenville had the prisoner brought before him, ordered an execution guard of six men, and the wretch was compelled to suffer the fate that his companions would have met, had his treachery been successful.

With a perfect contempt for his cruel prisoner, and a yearning to rid the sea of such a monster, Launcelot Grenville found it hard to resist visiting upon El Selik the same fate meted out to the traitor Spaniard; but he had given his word to release him at the Azores, and shortly after darkness settled upon the sea, the brig ran in and landed the Rais on the coast, a league from the town, and then once more stood out into blue waters to dare danger and destiny.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TREASURE ISLE.

It was a fearful night of storm, and the waves of the Mexican Gulf ran mountain-high, and the waters were lashed into foam until they looked like billows of snow.

The clouds trailed low, and were inky-black, and only the phosphorescent glare of the sea gave light enough for the human eye to discern a vessel struggling for life in that mad scene.

For days the storm had prevailed, for it was the equinoctial gale, and the bearings were at fault, and none on board the little craft knew exactly how far from the land they were, and the commander had just given orders to lay the vessel to, when it was raised upon a mighty wave, and hurled with terrific force upon a rocky reef.

Instantly the wildest confusion followed the crash, and the frightened seamen began to cut away the life-boats, for they dreaded that the vessel would go to pieces and they be engulfed with the wreck.

In vain did their commander urge them against the course they were taking, for, wild with fear, they would obey no command; the boats were filled with the panic-stricken crew, and a huge wave sweeping the decks, they were carried off on its bosom—to death.

To death, yes, for there were breakers to the lee of the rocks upon which the vessel lay, and the two boats, crowded with human freight, were dashed to pieces in the twinkling of an eye; the shrieks of the drowning men arose above the howling of the wind, and roar of the sea, and were heard by the few who yet remained upon the fated craft.

And upon that vessel what a scene! Driven high upon the rocks, the masts had come crashing down when she struck, and the seas beat against the hull with a force that threatened to tear it into atoms with each coming watery avalanche.

Upon the deck, crouching down behind the stump of the mainmast, was a huge form, which a flash of lightning showed to be a negro, calm, courageous, and yet clinging for his life—the only person visible upon the wreck.

From the cabin a faint light streamed, and within were three human beings, nay, four, for one lay there dead.

Over that dead form a man bent in the bitter agony of grief, and his eyes looked down upon the beautiful, upturned face, that gave back no glance of love.

In a corner of the cabin, crouching down among a pile of cushions, sat an elderly woman, hugging to her breast a little bundle that contained a wee infant—a baby boy that had been ushered into the world amid that scene of wreck and death, and whose mother had given to him her life.

It was a sad, a pitiable scene, and the strong man who bent over his dead wife, cared not how soon it would end in death for him, and in his heart he cursed the stanch hull that still withstood the shocks of the waves.

And thus, through the long hours of that fearful night, the group in the cabin remained unchanged, and the giant negro on deck clung to the shattered mast.

But the longest, dreariest night has an ending; at last the gray dawn fell upon the sea; the winds died away, and the waves ran less high.

With the rising sun the grief-stricken man

came upon deck, and in his haggard, white, sorrow-lined face it was hard to recognize the handsome Launcelot Grenville.

Yet it was none other than that waif of misfortune whom Fate dogged so cruelly.

With a sweeping glance he took in the scene—the hull, still stanch, high on a reef, and half a mile distant from a small island, nearly barren of verdure.

No other land was in sight, and desolation was upon all around, and the prospect looked dreary indeed.

But Launcelot Grenville was no man to yield to despair when there were other lives dependent upon him, and he quickly looked around for means of succor.

Forward, swept into the fore-castle, the brig's cutter still remained, and fortunately was not damaged, and below decks there were spars, sails and oars, and the island, Launcelot knew, was near the Mexican coast.

Had he been alone it is doubtful if he would have made an effort to save himself; but there was a young life in the cabin that he must live for, now that the mother had gone; the faithful nurse and Abyssinian slave had served their mistress well; it was his duty to aid them in their danger and distress. He at once set to work, and with the assistance of the huge black, soon had the cutter rigged, and bringing the dead form from the cabin, he placed it in the boat and steered for the shore.

In a group of stunted trees, a sheltered nook, a grave was dug and the body of Zulah placed therein, Launcelot Grenville filling the grave with a hard, stern look upon his face that showed how he was burying from sight more than his life.

Having attended to this sad duty, the sorrowing man, still accompanied by the faithful slave, explored the island, and in the interior, among a heap of rocks, found a large cave, and here the vast treasure on board the brig was brought, and also the stores, and securely hidden, and left under the charge of the Abyssinian, who readily accepted the task imposed upon him.

Then Launcelot Grenville returned on board the wreck, and taking the nurse and tiny infant into his boat, set sail from the island, heading toward the nearest point of the mainland of Mexico, where he knew he could find a settlement.

A night's sail and the little cutter put into a small coast town, and the nurse and infant were at once well cared for, while Launcelot Grenville, restless, wretched, and seeking stirring action to drown his sorrows, departed for Vera Cruz; and from thence to the City of Mexico, where he reported to the Government the loss of his schooner, by being run down in the Gulf by the Reindeer, four years before, and his escape, capture by the Moors, and long captivity as a slave to an Arab sheik.

His final escape from Morocco and return to Mexico he also made known, but his more personal affairs—his having been a corsair, marriage, and the loss of the brig, he did not make known.

The magnates of the Government were delighted to welcome him back, for he had been a gallant officer in their service, and having no vessel then to give him, they made him the commander of a regiment of Lancers.

But as a colonel in the army, Launcelot Grenville found not the field for excitement the sea presented, and he begged to be allowed to command a privateer once more; so he was placed on board a slow-going, lubberly brigantine, poorly armed, yet with a good crew, and told to capture a better vessel if he wanted one.

"I will," was his grim reply to the Mexican Junta, and he put to sea, and his order to his helmsman proved that he would keep his word, for he said, sternly:

"Stand for Barrataria—the rendezvous of the Gulf buccaneers."

CHAPTER XV.

THE BITTER BITTEN.

"SAIL HO!"

From the mast-head of a slow-sailing brigantine the cry rung out, and an officer pacing to and fro glanced quickly around the horizon, and soon settled his glass upon a sail just visible to a keen eye.

With a strong wind blowing it was not long before the raking topsails of a schooner arose in view, followed soon after by a huge fore and mainsail, hovering over a long hull, low in the water, and showing unmistakable signs of being an armed deck.

"Senor Miguel, if I am not mistaken, yonder vessel will prevent our running on to Barrataria," and Captain Launcelot Grenville, in the full uniform of a Mexican naval commander, turned to his first lieutenant, a handsome, dashing young fellow.

"He is heavier than we are, and doubtless carries more men, and it would be as well to run for it," said Alvez Miguel, regarding the vessel attentively.

"You misunderstand me, senor; we will capture her, and thereby save a run to the buccaneer rendezvous," said Captain Grenville, quickly.

The Lieutenant looked surprised, and again

turned his glass upon the schooner, and said, after awhile:

"My captain, yonder craft carries two guns to our one, and has fully double the number of the brigantine's crew; it would be madness to fight him."

"I think not; that he is a buccaneer I feel convinced, and perhaps Lafitte's own vessel. If so I will be glad; but if not the pirate chief's own craft, it is one of his fleet, and a beauty. Let the brigantine fall off, helmsman. Steady! Now, Senor Miguel, set all the sail she can carry."

The brigantine's change of course placed the schooner astern, and the lieutenant said pleasantly:

"You have determined to run for it, then, Captain Grenville?"

"Yes."

"And the schooner is squaring away to give chase, and if her looks do not belie her, can sail three feet to our one."

"So much the better; we have a fair wind, a good start, and we will try the schooner at all her sailing points. Set the American colors, Senor Miguel, and then have the crew hide our guns under tarpaulins."

The young Mexican seemed surprised at the manner of his commander, but promptly obeyed his orders, and seven of the nine guns carried by the brigantine were soon concealed by slanting tarpaulins tacked from the bulwark rail to the deck.

"Now send all but twenty of the men below, Senor Miguel."

This order was also at once obeyed, and the brigantine, with only two guns visible, and a few men, presented the appearance of a merchant craft, carrying a couple of cannon, and a crew of fair size, for protection, for in those days vessels went armed against the buccaneers that roved the Gulf and its shores.

"Now, Senor Miguel, we will disguise ourselves," said Captain Grenville, and entering the cabin he soon returned with a citizen's coat over his uniform—Alvez Miguel and the other officers following his example.

"If that is a buccaneer, and I believe he is, senor, our disguise will not aid us, for those fellows search a vessel from keel to deck," said the lieutenant.

Captain Grenville made no reply, but turned his gaze upon the schooner, which was coming on before the wind, her huge sails thrown wing-and-wing, and running at a tremendous speed, which threatened to overhaul the brigantine before nightfall.

"She sails like a witch before the wind. We'll try her with the breeze over her stern-quarter," said Captain Grenville, and he gave the order to change the brigantine's course, which was at once done.

For half an hour the brigantine held on, running at her best pace, but the schooner seemed to gain even more rapidly, and the Mexican crew knew that escape was impossible, for, though night was coming on, it would be bright starlight, and there would be no hope of eluding the keen eyes of those on their path, even in darkness.

As the schooner drew nearer it could be seen that she carried a crew of fully a hundred men, and that she was a buccaneer was evident as the red caps of the crew were visible above the bulwarks.

"She has six guns to a broadside, and three pivots, senor," said Lieutenant Miguel, closely examining the schooner.

"Yes, he is well armed and manned. I am glad night will come before he gets near enough to examine us more closely. Hal! there goes his flag—Carthaginian!" and as Captain Grenville spoke the colors of Carthage were unfurled, to be immediately lowered and another flag sent up in their place, which, when shaken out, displayed a blue field, in the center of which was a pair of red crossed swords.

As the flag fluttered out in the wind a puff of smoke burst from the schooner's bows, and an iron messenger came flying after the brigantine.

"It is one of Lafitte's fleet," said Launcelot Grenville, without any trace of dread at the discovery, and he descended into his cabin.

In half an hour he returned to the deck, and a change had come, for darkness had now settled upon the sea; the schooner was not half a mile distant, and had kept up a slow, but steady fire at the brigantine, cutting away the main-topmast, piercing the bulwarks and laying several of the crew dead and dying upon the decks.

Still the brigantine had held on, though why its commander kept up a fight that was useless Alvez Miguel could not understand.

As Captain Grenville reached the deck another shot buried itself in the mainmast, showing that the aim of the buccaneer was improving notwithstanding the darkness.

"That is a hint we had better follow. Bring the vessel to, Senor Miguel," said Captain Grenville, with a *sang froid* that his crew were far from feeling.

The brigantine accordingly swept around until she lay head to the wind, rocking upon the waves, while the schooner soon after rushed by

her, a cable's length distant, her men at the guns, and looking threatening indeed.

Sweeping up into the wind, after having gotten well astern, the buccaneer began to beat up to the brigantine under shortened sail, and soon ran alongside and cast out the grapnels, while scores of ferocious-looking men prepared to spring on board.

But, suddenly, from the broadside of the brigantine burst a sheet of livid flame, and the guns, charged heavily with small shot, tore through the crowded ranks of the buccaneers, while, with a loud cry to his men to follow him, Launcelot Grenville, now in full uniform, sprung upon the deck of the schooner.

Instantly at his back came Alvez Miguel and half a hundred Mexicans, and so great was the surprise of the pirates, and so deadly had been the broadside from the brigantine at arm's length, that they were driven in confusion backward, and following up the advantage thus gained the crew of the cruiser threw themselves forward with irresistible force, led on by their fearless leader, and in a very few minutes voices arose in cries for mercy, and the schooner was won. Launcelot Grenville had kept his word and captured a splendid vessel, above which to hoist the flag of Mexico, and the buccaneers, who had expected to meet only an armed merchantman, had found that the biter was bitten.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DARING RUSE.

It was a bright, starlit night, and yet the silver-bespangled heavens failed to brighten up the dark pile of stone that formed the proud fortress of Mexico, known as the Castle San Juan de Uloa.

Through its embrasures here and there glimmered a faint light that proved life was within; but, otherwise, it rose above the waters black, gloomy and threatening—a huge, grim sentinel that had stood guard for generations over the city of Vera Cruz.

Slowly toward this massive fortress a vessel was heading, its destination evidently being the port beyond, where the lights twinkled brightly in windows and upon vessels at anchor.

Suddenly, from the dark hull of the approaching vessel burst jets of flame, and the deep boom of cannon followed; but there was no roar of shot, no iron messengers hurled against the fortress; the cruiser was only saluting the "Iron Gate to Mexico," and stood on her way up to the city, the castle replying to the salute in deep tones from her brazen throats, as though with angry growl at being disturbed from its repose.

As the flash of her dogs of war lighted up the vessel it showed a most rakish-looking schooner, trim as a yacht in build, and yet threatening and vicious in appearance, for she was heavily armed, and, from the number of men upon her decks, possessed a large crew.

Every rope was in place; the crew went about their duties silent and with promptness; and it was evident that the one in command was a strict disciplinarian and a thorough seaman.

Upon the quarter-deck, leaning against the high bulwarks, his arms folded upon his broad breast, and a cigar between his teeth, stood that commander—Launcelot Grenville, his dark face more stern than ever, and his somber eyes gazing upon the lights of the distant city.

After a most successful cruise, in the schooner he had so gallantly captured, he was returning to Vera Cruz, into which port he had sent several Spanish prizes taken in West Indian waters, and there was a calm joy at his heart in the hope that he would soon see his baby boy, to whom he clung with a love as deep as that he had felt for the lost Zulah, who slept in her grave upon the treasure island.

Gliding swiftly up the harbor the beautiful schooner dropped anchor, and a boat was called away for her commander to go on shore, when a Government barge ran alongside.

It contained eight oarsmen, a dozen marines and an officer, the latter, followed by the soldiers, at once springing on board.

"I would see Captain Grenville," said the officer.

"I am Launcelot Grenville, senor; what is your will with me?" and Launcelot stepped forward and saluted the official.

"You are aware that the Government of Mexico has changed in the past few months, senor?"

"I was not aware of anything of the kind, senor," calmly replied Launcelot, though he felt that there was trouble brewing for him.

"It is a fact though; the Government was overthrown three months ago, and the Revolutionists now are in power, Captain Grenville."

"And the prizes which I have sent in, senor?"

"Were taken by the party now in power, and which I may add, is more powerful than the other; of course you will side with the Revolutionists, senor?" and the officer gazed fixedly into the face of the schooner's commander.

"To be executed as a traitor when the legitimate Government gets back in power! No, senor, I owe my allegiance to those who placed my commission in my hands, and to that *junta* alone am I responsible."

"The present one will hold you responsible,

senor, and I advise you to yield gracefully, for the fate you hint of as a traitor to the old party, may be meted out to you by the new."

"Senor, I am not to be intimidated by possibilities; I left this port nearly a year ago in a miserable craft, but with a good crew; I captured this schooner, one of the fleetest and best afloat; have taken a number of valuable prizes and sent them hither, and now I return to be thrown about like a shuttlecock. What guarantee have I that when I return from another cruise I may not find the old party in power? None! I will remain true to the Government that I have faithfully served."

"I regret your decision, senor, for—"

"I am listening," said Launcelot as the other paused.

"I have orders to seize your vessel and place you in irons."

Captain Grenville smiled, and glanced over the small force brought by the Mexican.

"Senor, you should have come better prepared to carry out such an intention—I have seventy-five men on board here, and seventy of them, I may add, are buccaneers whom I persuaded to step from under the black flag to the protection of the Mexican colors, and they are not to be trifled with; but I wish no trouble if it can be avoided, and I beg that you give me time to think the matter over."

"Were it possible for a vessel to put to sea past the castle, I would believe you intended to do so; but knowing that you would be sunk in ten minutes, I will give you an hour to consider. Remember, too, that you and your officers hold the same rank under the present Government that you did before, and that your share of the prizes are not forfeited."

"You will return, then, within the hour?"

"Yes, senor," and the Mexican departed, but instead of rowing ashore he headed for the fortress of San Juan de Uloa, and arriving in hailing distance, called out to the sentinel that challenged the boat:

"A vessel may attempt to put to sea to-night. If so, sink it!"

"Si, senor!" cried an officer, in response, who seemed to recognize the voice of the speaker, as the chief of the harbor guard.

Hardly had the boat rowed away from the schooner, when Launcelot Grenville said:

"Senor Miguel, yonder lie the half-dozen prizes we sent in—jump into the cutter and visit each one, bringing back our prize crews with you, and be in a hurry, or that officer will return and catch you."

"Si, senor capitan," and the young lieutenant sprang into the schooner's cutter, and in half an hour returned with nearly two-score men, collected from the half-dozen prizes anchored near, and which Launcelot Grenville had sent into port under petty officers and a few men as a prize crew.

"Men, it is my intention to go out to sea, to-night; do you fear to follow me?" asked Captain Grenville, as the men gathered around him, for they knew that he was planning some bold maneuver.

To a man, they gave a low assent, for they had become deeply attached to their brave, yet stern commander.

Glancing over the crew, searchingly, Launcelot continued:

"I wish a score of men for a service of the deadliest danger—who will volunteer?"

Seeing that all were willing and anxious, he selected the requisite number from those nearest to him, and said, calmly:

"Take the cutter and go on board of the barque, and get all in readiness to sail at a moment's notice."

In silence, though wondering, the men obeyed, and a few moments after the government barque ran alongside the schooner, and the officer again sprang on board.

"Well, senor, I am here for your answer?"

"You shall have it. Senor Miguel, get up the anchor and set sail on the schooner."

"*Madre de Dios!* what is your intention?" cried the alarmed officer.

"To put to sea, senor, and if you and your men do not wish to accompany me, you had better return to your boat," was the reply.

"I command you, senor, to surrender this vessel to me!" yelled the officer, in a rage.

"And I decline to obey your command. Will you leave my schooner, senor, or shall I order my men to throw you overboard?"

The Mexican glanced over the crew standing around, and then upon his shrinking marines, and came to the conclusion that discretion was the better part of valor, so said, hoarsely:

"You shall hang for this, for you can never pass the castle. Into the boat, men!"

The marines obeyed with alacrity, and once in the large, the officer gave an order in a low tone, and away it sped down toward the castle.

As soon as it had left the side, Launcelot Grenville said:

"Senor Miguel, you understood my orders perfectly?"

"Yes, my captain."

"Then I shall at once go on board the barque, and as soon as I am under way, you start in pursuit!"

"Ay ay, senor capitan," and as the young

Mexican replied, Launcelot Grenville sprung over the side into a waiting boat, and rowed rapidly toward the large and graceful barque that lay two cable-lengths away.

Alvez Miguel watched the swiftly-rowing boat, saw it reach the barque, and immediately after the sails were spread, the bows swung round, and the beautiful vessel under a cloud of canvas headed for the open sea.

"Now, lads, lively and we'll give chase! man those bow guns there, and fire when I give the word!" cried the young lieutenant, and like huge wings the sails arose above the schooner's deck, and a moment after it forged through the water at a rapid rate, for a nine-knot breeze was blowing.

Instantly all was excitement in the harbor and along the shores; lights flashed on the decks of the numerous vessels at anchor, the guard-boats sent up rockets, and the bells of Vera Cruz rung out in wild alarm, while the deep boom of the signal guns added their roar to the confusion, and catching the contagion of uproar, the old castle of De Uloa, the guardian fortress of the city, was now illuminated and on the watch.

In the meantime the two vessels, the barque leading by a quarter of a mile, were rushing down the harbor at race-horse speed, heading directly for the open sea, which could only be gained by passing under the fearful gantlet of the guns of the Castle San Juan de Uloa, the parapets of which now were crowded with soldiers, as seen by the blue lights sent up.

As the barque overhauled the guard-boat, which had boarded the schooner, the officer recklessly attempted to throw himself and men on board; but the tall form at the vessel's helm suddenly brought the bows up, a crash followed, and shivered into atoms the barge; its crew were left struggling in the white wake of the flying vessel, while the other harbor cutters gave the fugitive craft a wide berth.

As the barque glided free of the drowning men, a bright flash suddenly burst from the bows of the privateer schooner, and a solid shot came whirling above the heads of Launcelot Grenville and his crew, every man of whom fully realized now the reckless, desperate plan of their daring commander to get to sea.

But like the very wind the barque flew on, lying well over under the pressure of the wind upon her clouds of canvas, and going at a twelve-knot pace, while the bow guns of the schooner rushing on in pursuit, sent shot after shot over and around their companions' heads.

But suddenly there came a crash as though the very earth was rent in twain, a blinding glare, and the roar of a hundred iron balls as they rushed shrieking through the air—the castle had opened upon the escaping vessel.

Through the white canvas, over the decks, cutting great gaps in the bulwarks, and sending showers of splinters upon every hand, the iron tornado passed over the barque, and left a fearful scene behind, for half a dozen men were slain, and others wounded.

But at the helm stood the grim commander, unhurt, calm as a statue, a cigar between his lips, and his eyes glancing over the damage done by the terrific fire from the castle.

"Not vitally hurt; now for a scattering fire, he said, calmly, and his men, inspired by his example, sprung back to their posts of duty.

Then, mingling with the rattle of the schooner's guns, was the deep basso of the cannon from the castle, and the speed of the barque alone kept the aim from proving fatal, for, as it was, she was struck time and again, her topmasts carried away, and half of her crew lay dead or dying upon her decks.

Suddenly another volley of giant guns from the castle, and the bowsprit was carried away, and the mizzen-mast went toppling over; but, fortunately for the daring man who yet held the helm of the shot-torn barque, he had passed the castle, and having gained an offing, squared right away before the wind, although it gave the fortress an opportunity to rake him fore and aft.

Instantly the guns were brought to bear on the brig, and so terrible did the fire become, even at that long distance, that the men shrunk from duty, and, as the foremast went down, they rushed below with cries of horror, leaving their leader still at the helm, bleeding from several wounds, but calm and determined.

But in vain did he attempt to hold the barque on her course, for with the rigging and spars dragging alongside, no one to obey his orders, and only the mainmast standing, the noble vessel could do no more, and lay a sinking wreck upon the waters, while the yell that burst from the soldiers at the castle came distinctly to the ears of Launcelot Grenville.

And the schooner, what of it? Not five cable lengths away it came on like the wind, and luffing up, was skillfully brought alongside of the barque, while a dozen forms sprung upon the shattered vessel.

"Captain Grenville! Praise to the Virgin Mother that you are alive! but what a very hell this craft has been! Are all the crew dead?"

"No, Senor Miguel, those that are not dead run below. Call them up and let us keep on at once, for my rule will soon be known at the

castle, as soon as the guard-boats arrive there with the crew I ran down," said Launcelot Grenville, and he was supported by two of his men to the deck of the schooner, while those of the barque's crew who had gone below, and the wounded, were quickly transferred to the privateer.

"Now set the barque afire, Miguel, and let us stand out to sea, as though just getting out of the way of the burning wreck; you kept up that chase bravely, and the schooner was not suspected, so we have a splendid craft beneath our feet. Cast loose there!" and as Captain Grenville gave the last order, the schooner swung clear from the wreck, from which the flames now burst in fury.

The castle, leaving the affair to the schooner, for the daring ruse was not yet known, had ceased firing, and then the men had left their guns, expecting the privateer to bring the barque back into port; but, as the little craft, under all the canvas that would draw, after tacking once or twice, suddenly stood seaward, leaving the burning wreck astern, the officers of the fortress could not understand the strange maneuver.

"There is doubtless a strange sail in sight," said the Governor-General of the castle, "and he has gone in pursuit; but what does the officer in that guard-boat say, Redrez?"

A hail from a guard-boat had attracted the attention of the Governor-General of the fortress.

"Ay! ay! senor, what is it?" called out Colonel Redrez, the *aide-de-camp*.

"Senor, you fired upon the wrong craft; the schooner sent the barque ahead and gave chase, as a ruse to escape to sea unhurt, and, *maldito!* he ran me down and drowned half of my men. Fire upon the schooner, Senor Governor!"

It was the officer of the wrecked guard-boat that spoke, and who had been picked up by another barge with those of his crew who had not been killed or drowned by the barque running them down.

Instantly the guns of the castle were manned once more, and turned upon the schooner, going seaward with the speed of a bird; but the distance was too great now, and the privateer escaped out of range, and disappeared in the darkness.

"There is the only hope of capture now," said the Governor, pointing to an armed cutter and a brigantine-of-war coming down the harbor, and pushing on in rapid chase of the schooner, now two leagues away.

CHAPTER XVII.

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

AFTER his desperate, yet successful flight from Vera Cruz, Launcelot Grenville gained a good offing, and then headed down the coast.

What would be his future course he knew not, for, in making his escape, he had but followed the promptings of a determination not to serve the Revolutionists, who had overthrown the Government to which he owed allegiance.

Resolved not to submit, he had taken a desperate measure to get out to sea with his vessel, yet not knowing what he would do after he did so.

Although wounded several times in running the gantlet of the castle's guns, he was not much hurt, and after the surgeon had dressed his wounds, he called his officers into the cabin, and told them that he intended to visit Vera Cruz in disguise and hold communication with the deposed Junta ere he came to any decision regarding his actions for the future.

Although it would be attended with the greatest risk, Launcelot Grenville could not be deterred from going to Vera Cruz, and the schooner was at once put away for the mouth of the Alvarado river in the vicinity of which her commander knew there were lagoons where he could find a safe hiding-place for his vessel.

Running in shore by night, he found the requisite retreat for the schooner, and, giving orders to Alvez Miguel, who remained in command, that no one, under any pretense, should leave the vessel, he disguised himself as a coast fisherman, and was rowed to the mainland and left alone to go upon his perilous mission.

Although he was anxious to learn the exact situation of affairs in Mexico, and to see what hope there was of the Revolutionists holding power, he was far more desirous of seeing his baby boy, who, with his nurse, was then in Vera Cruz, and consequently he directed his steps to that city.

By traveling at night, only, Launcelot reached Vera Cruz in safety, and at once sought the house where he knew the Persian nurse, Allene, to live with his little boy.

It was late when he arrived, but his knock was at once answered by an old Mexican woman, who inquired his business.

He replied that he wished to see the Senora Allene, and the Persian woman at once appeared, for she recognized his voice.

"Come in, most noble Rais," she cried, addressing him, as was the custom, in the manner of the East.

Entering, the door was quickly closed behind him, and a seat brought forward by the Mexi-

can woman, who now recognized in the fisherman her liberal patron, for Launcelot had been most generous toward her.

"My boy? my little Merle?" he asked anxiously.

"Sleeps there, oh Rais, and is as beautiful as was his mother, my august mistress, though he has your dark, sad eyes," said the nurse, proudly, and she drew back the silk covering from the sleeping child.

For some moments the father stood gazing in silence upon his baby boy, and then stooping over he kissed the rosebud mouth and turned away, his lip, ever firm amid scenes of carnage, quivering with emotion.

"He is very beautiful, Allene. Here, I have brought you gold for his wants, and your own; and, senora, I have not forgotten you."

As he spoke, he gave a belt of gold into the hands of Allene, and threw a purse, heavy with the same precious metal, into the lap of the old Mexican woman, who hugged it to her breast with a rapture that proved that it was her god, as it is of most people, kind reader.

"I will come again to-morrow, Allene, but not in this disguise, perhaps. You know why I am thus disguised?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes, oh mig! Rais; the town is full of your splendid ad, and I feared you had not escaped the iron hail showered upon you; you bear a charmed life, great skimmer of the seas," said Allene, with enthusiasm.

"So it seems, Allene; but whether rescued for good or bad who can tell?" he said, sadly, and bidding the woman *adios* he left the house and wended his way to the shop of a Spanish Jew with whom he had had dealings quite often. A loud knock aroused the Jew, and cautiously he opened the door.

"Delbanco, I would come in, for I need your aid; I am the Senor Grenville," he said, softly.

"Holy Abraham! Senor, your life hangs by a thread in this town. Come right in."

"So I know, my friend; but I do not fear to trust you, as you see."

The Jew led him into an inner room, beyond his shop, which had the appearance of a museum, as it contained a sample of nearly every manufactured article in the world.

"Be seated, senor, and while I open this wine tell me how I can serve you—but, *diablo!* what a deed was that of yours last week! You are a fearless man, senor," and the Jew placed before his guest a bottle of wine and glasses.

"Delbanco, where is my old regiment of Lancers?" asked Launcelot, thoughtfully.

"Up in the Sierra Madre mountains, senor; they were ordered there months ago from the capital."

"They sided with the Revolutionists, doubtless?"

"Yes, senor."

"And you, Delbanco?"

"I am always the friend of the party in power, senor; but the Revolutionists regret losing you, while the old defenders of the Government rejoice that you acted as you did, and remained loyal."

"Have you a uniform of the Lancers, Delbanco?"

"Yes, senor, a captain's."

"Good; if it will fit me I will take it. You remember Captain Verona?"

"The officer who looked so much like yourself, senor?"

"The same; has he been in town of late?"

"Not since you were here together, senor."

"And none of the regiment are in the city?"

"No, senor; if there were I would know it."

"I know that you would. Now, Delbanco, get me out the uniform, a sword, pistols, a saddle, bridle, and all that I need for my make-up, for you have a horse in your stable, doubtless?"

"A dozen, senor."

"Well, I wish the best, and here is gold to repay you."

"Senor capitan, I like you, and I would warn you that you may be discovered not to be Captain Verona."

"I shall take those chances. Now get me ready, Delbanco."

The Jew obeyed, and in half an hour after an officer of Lancers dismounted before the principal inn and asked for accommodations.

He was at once shown to a pleasant room, and in a few minutes more Launcelot Grenville was sleeping as quietly as though he were not in the lion's den, with death hovering over him, should the bold game he was playing become known.

At a late hour the following morning Launcelot Grenville arose, breakfasted and then strolled out into the plaza, where he was suddenly confronted by a young *aide* whom he had met before and slightly knew.

"Ha, Verona, when did you get into the city? Thought you were with your regiment in the Sierras!" and the young officer stretched out his hand in a friendly way.

"I arrived last night, Major Cavallo, and am on short leave," said Launcelot, keeping up his disguise admirably.

"I am delighted you are here, and you must come to the general's to a ball to-night. Now I won't have you say no, for all the beauties in Vera Cruz are to be there, and, as assistant host to my commander, I invite you."

"You are very kind, senor, and I will come if possible."

"You must come. By the way, what do you think of the flight of that mad American, the other day?"

"You refer to the escape of Captain Grenville, doubtless?"

"Yes; he fooled the castle to a man, and, from the Governor down, they have all to open wine whenever they show themselves in the city. The new government officials are crazy over it, for they would give much to have Grenville in their service. They have outlawed him—see there!"

The young officer pointed to a large placard tacked upon a conspicuous place, and without a change in his dark face, Launcelot Grenville read:

"Announcement!"

"Whereas, an officer in the naval service of Mexico, has boldly, defiantly, and intentionally turned a traitor to the existing Government, and raised the red hand of outlawry against officials, in the discharge of their duty; be it declared by the Mexican Junta this day, March 10th., 18—, that said treacherous personage, Launcelot Grenville, is hereby branded as a pirate, and with his associate officers and crew shall be treated as free rovers wherever and whenever found, either upon the land or sea."

"Signed,

"THE JUNTA OF MEXICO."

"By the way, Verona, how much you look like that Captain Grenville. I have remarked it before," said the Mexican.

"Yes, there is said to be a striking likeness between us; but he has certainly run his head into the noose by his act. Will the Junta send this proclamation abroad, Senor Cavallo?" said Launcelot, with perfect composure.

"Oh, no! They do their duty in branding him, and there it ends. If he falls into the hands of any of our cruisers he will be hung up with his crew, and there the matter will end, for outside countries seem to care very little what takes place in our sunny land of Mexico; but remember the ball to-night, Captain Verona, for I shall expect you," and the Mexican passed on, while Launcelot Grenville muttered, as he walked leisurely along:

"Well, I am branded as a pirate, and will be hunted from sea to sea."

"So be it, let the end be what it may, for Fate leads me on and I blindly follow."

"I had hoped for a different end—had hoped to leave an honorable name for my boy to bear, and that the world would never know that I had been an officer on the deck of a Moorish corsair. Oh! what a bitter, fearful destiny has been mine! Accused of being a very Cain—the slayer of the father of poor Lucille whom I so fondly loved, and thereby becoming her destroyer too! Oh, God! I can never blot out that night when she fell upon her father's grave, her own hand driving the knife into her bosom!"

"How I have suffered Heaven only knows, and why I have been spared through all surpasseth my comprehension; but I will not yield to death or despair now. No, I will live for my beautiful boy, and let Fate do its worst."

He had stopped in his walk and was gazing out upon the harbor, his heart throbbing, his brain on fire, yet his face motionless.

"By Heaven! I love this life of desperate danger, and I will go to-night to that ball, come what may."

Just then a vehicle passed with an elderly gentleman and a beautiful maiden in it, and at sight of the tall form in the uniform of the Mexican Lancers, they drew up.

"Ha, Senor Verona, glad to see you in town. Going to the ball at the general-commandante's to-night?" said the gentleman, whom Launcelot recognized as a distinguished lawyer.

"Yes, Senor Merillo, I will be there. Senorita Ysabel, I hope you are well?"

The beautiful maiden bowed, and the vehicle passed on.

"I have more confidence in my disguise, as I have deceived the lovely eyes of Ysabel Merillo. Now let me see if any of the leaders of the old Government can be found in town," and Launcelot turned into a by-street which led to the abode of the Jew, Delbanco.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WARNING.

"An, senor, let me beg of you not to go there. You have your hand on the lion's mane as it is, so do not put it in his mouth, I entreat," said Delbanco, earnestly, in answer to Launcelot's announcement that he intended going to the ball to be given at the general head-quarters that night.

"It is a mask-ball, Delbanco."

"Oh, yes, and if you would only retire at the end of the evening, and not remove your mask; but you will not, I know."

"I shall remove my mask with the others, senor. Now I wish you to send for the Senors Garcia, Morez and Cisneros, who you say are in town in disguise. Tell them to come here, for it might attract attention for me to visit them."

"They will come, senor capitan. I will at once go in search of them. Enter my parlor, please, until my return."

He led the way through a narrow hall, threw

open a door, concealed by a heavy curtain and the visitor started at the scene of magnificence that burst upon him.

It was a large room, leading by several full-length windows out upon a marble-paved plaza, the center of which was ornamented with a large fountain, around which were grouped beds of beautiful flowers.

A few trees were in the court, which was surrounded by a high wall, the fountain was throwing jets of water into the air, fishes swam in the basin at its base, and numbers of birds of rare plumage were fluttering about amid the foliage.

The room that looked out upon this scene was beautiful in the extreme, for a velvet carpet covered the floor, silk curtains fell in folds over the windows, and satin divans and easy-chairs were scattered here and there, while a guitar, some half-withered roses and several books lay upon a lounge, that looked as though it might have been recently occupied.

"Rest here, senor, and if you wish wine and refreshments, sound that silver gong on the table and a servant will attend you. Now I will be off," and Delbanco left the room, while Launcelot glanced around him in amazement at the beautiful scene.

"The Jew must be as rich as a Croesus to live in this style. Who would have thought that a palace of beauty could be so near his old curiosity shop," and Launcelot threw himself down upon a divan and took up the guitar.

Running his fingers over the strings with skillful touch, he broke into a Spanish love-song he had learned from his mother, and his rich voice filled the room with melody.

"Bravo, senor capitan! I could not resist the temptation to intrude."

In an instant he was upon his feet, and fairly started with surprised admiration as his eyes fell upon a form of exquisite loveliness, and a face of surpassing beauty within a few feet of him, and just peeping out from beneath the silken curtain that concealed a door.

It was a dark face of Spanish beauty, with raven hair, lashes long and thick, and a mouth full and expressive, while her age could not have been more than twenty.

Dressed in a white robe of some light gauzy material, she wore only as ornaments a comb of solid gold, which held up her masses of black hair, a gold anchor for a brooch, and a solitaire ring, the stone being of immense size and beauty.

"It is I that am the intruder, fair lady, for this is doubtless your bower of beauty; but I knew not that the Senor Delbanco had a—"

He paused, and with a laugh the maiden entered the room and said:

"A wife, you were going to say; nor has he for my mother died years ago. I am his daughter, Juanita Delbanco, and you are Captain Grenville, the—"

"Permit me to add the word for you, senorita—the pirate," and there was a sneer in the voice.

"No, no, no, senor; I meant not to say that, but I hesitated because I feared to say to your face what was upon my tongue; but I will continue the sentence as I intended—the hero of the most gallant act ever known in Mexico."

"Thank you, senorita; you refer to my running the gantlet past the castle?"

"Yes, for I know that you went on the barque, and my father and myself were visiting a friend, whose house overlooks the harbor, and we saw it all; but, senor capitan, have we not met before?"

"There is something about your face that is familiar, senorita, and yet—"

"Permit me to refresh your memory, and also to thank you for a service rendered. Some years ago you came to the rescue of a small party who had been attacked by mountain robbers?"

"Yes, near Puebla."

"Have you forgotten that there was in the party a young girl just returning from the convent in the city of Mexico to her home at Vera Cruz?"

"Ah, I remember you now; and you are that young girl?"

"I am, and I owe you more than I can ever repay. My father's agent was along, and he had with him a great deal of gold, which your bravely coming to the rescue saved to him. What a fate you saved me from you well know, and I have so longed to see you that I might tell you how I appreciated what you have done for me."

"It was a simple service, senorita. I was going to Mexico to report the result of my cruise to the Government, and, with my two companions, heard your cry and came upon the robbers attacking you and your escort."

"Few men would have taken the chances against that robber band, and fewer men would have been successful. Now you may understand why my father has ever been your warm friend, for, though he has never spoken with you upon the subject, he knows well all that you saved him and his daughter. But, senor capitan, I overheard that you were going to the ball at the commandante's head-quarters to-night—let me entreat that you be not thus reckless."

"I love danger, senorita, for the excitement it brings, and have determined to go; but will you not favor me with a song?" and Launcelot spoke as though desirous of changing the conversation.

"You must pardon me if I refuse, for my father will soon return and I do not care to have him see me here, or even know that I have seen you. I will send you refreshments and a cigar, and leave you to your own meditations. Adios, senor capitan."

Without another word Juanita Delbanco left the room, disappearing behind the curtained door by which she had entered.

A moment after a servant, a peon, entered with a silver salver, loaded with fruits, sweetmeats, wine and cigars, and placing them upon a table withdrew in silence.

Dashing off a glass of the rare Mexican wine, and lighting a cigar, Launcelot stepped out into the plaza, and paced to and fro as was his habit when on board ship, while his thoughts were busy with the past, and his brow dark and clouded.

Presently the Jew appeared before him.

"The senors are within, Captain Grenville, and await your pleasure."

"I thank you, senor," and Launcelot Grenville entered the room once more, to find there three men, whom, having thrown aside the disguises they wore, he recognized as members of the Government that had given him his commission.

"Ah, Senor Grenville, a sad change for us all—you denounced as a pirate, and we hiding under disguises, while the Revolutionists are in power," whined one of the three ex-leaders of Mexico.

"It certainly looks bad, senors; but the Revolutionists are not so strong but what they can be overthrown," boldly said Launcelot.

"Ah, senor, that is impossible; we are crushed to the earth."

"Why, senors, I believed I would find in you men willing to risk everything to drag the party now in power down into the dust. It cannot be that you are cowed as well as defeated," said Launcelot, contemptuously.

"Senor, we know what would be the result; hope is dead with us."

"Bah! I believe I could easily raise men enough to strike down the Governmental usurpers, and—"

"No, no, my dear captain; it must not be, or all our heads will go; we will all be hunted down."

"So be it, senors; you know best, and I merely spoke to offer my aid in case you intended striking again for power; but I am outlawed as it is, and shall henceforth take no interest in Mexico. Adios, senors, for I do not think we shall meet again," and Launcelot left the room and the house, and, it being now dark, wended his way to the home where dwelt his baby boy, muttering between his teeth:

"I expected to find them ready to strike against their foes; but lo, they are as cowardly as foxes, and, with the Revolutionists in power, the brand of buccaneer must still stand against my name."

Suddenly a slender form confronted him, and a slip of paper was thrust into his hand, and the one who gave it to him disappeared in the darkness ere he could follow him.

By the aid of a light that shone from a window near by, Launcelot Grenville examined the paper, and saw written thereon, in English, and in a round hand:

"Be warned! Do not attend the commandante's ball to-night!"

There was nothing more, and no signature. What could it mean, and who could have sent the warning?

CHAPTER XIX.

THE COMMANDANTE'S BALL.

THE spacious and handsome quarters of the Commandante-General of Vera Cruz were grandly illuminated in honor of the eighteenth birthday anniversary of his beautiful daughter, Claudita Ignacio, and thither had gathered all the beauty and chivalry of the city.

The entertainment was to be *en costume* and *en masque*, and for weeks the lovely senoritas and young senors—for married women hold much power in Mexican society—had been getting their dresses ready, while the gentlemen, both in military, naval and civil life, were desirous of making display.

Among those who attracted the most attention for his elegant form and bearing, though his face could not be seen, as he wore a close-fitting mask, was one dressed in the full uniform of a Captain of the Lancers, who, after bowing before the commandante-general and the beautiful Claudita, and wishing for the latter many happy returns of the day, walked slowly through the different salons, gazing at the brilliant assemblage, and almost fairy scene.

"I am glad you came, Captain Verona, and a tiny hand was slipped into his arm, and a mask of blue silk, worn by a maiden in Moorish costume, was turned up to his face."

The man started suddenly, as he glanced down at the maiden, and then said, quietly:

"Have you not made a mistake, senorita?"

"Oh, no, I would know your form and bearing anywhere, senior; besides, your uniform tells me you are—"

"And your sweet voice tells me that I am honored by the company of the sweet *Senorita Ysabel Merillo*," said the soldier, interrupting her.

"Then, as you know me, Captain Verona, may I ask why you have treated me so cavalierly, and not called upon me, as I had a right to expect?"

"*Senorita*, my time has been so occupied since my arrival that I have not had a moment to devote to pleasure."

"*Enrique Verona*, your duty was to the woman you profess to love; but if you are tired of the allegiance you are wholly free," and the soft voice was reproachful in its tone.

Ere the officer could make reply to the sweet *Ysabel*, a young midshipman came up to him, and said, pleasantly:

"I word in your ear, senior. A fair lady demands that I bring you to her side at once, if the *senorita* will pardon me."

Ysabel bowed and withdrew her hand from the officer's arm at once; but he led her to a seat, and then turned to the messenger, whose slight form was elegant in the extreme, and his uniform most costly and rich.

"Who would see me, senior?" he asked.

Without replying, the youth drew the officer to one side, and then said, in a low tone:

"This is no place for Captain Grenville."

In spite of his nerve, *Launcelot Grenville* gave a slight start; but added, in the same cautious tone:

"Do you tell me this as a friend?"

"Yes, one who would save you— *Por Dios!* behold!"

Launcelot turned at the quick exclamation of the youth, and beheld, unmasked, and approaching the commandante, an officer of the *Lanceros*, his uniform and rank the same as his own, and his form strangely alike, while his face was dark, and also bore a striking resemblance to his own.

"Senior, it is Captain *Enrique Verona*, the man you impersonate," said the midshipman.

"So I see. Come, let us draw near and see to what unlucky circumstance I am indebted for his untimely arrival," coolly said *Launcelot*, and, arm in arm with the midshipman, they approached the spot where the commandante stood, greeting his guest, and heard him say:

"Both *Claudita* and myself were confident we welcomed you half an hour ago in mask, Captain *Verona*, so you have here a counterpart; but when did you arrive?"

"An hour since, senior general, and I invited myself to your ball, as I bear dispatches to you. Permit me to place them in your keeping," and the officer handed a sealed package to the commandante, who excused himself and turned away, while the maiden in Turkish costume came forward and said, in a low tone:

"Captain *Verona*, I heard you say that you had just arrived in *Vera Cruz*?"

"*Si, senorita*, an hour ago, and I could not resist the temptation of coming here although not in mask."

The maiden seemed puzzled, and replied:

"You were in mask half an hour ago, senior?"

"No, lady; it must have been my counterpart, of whom the general spoke; but I knew not that any of our officers were in *Vera Cruz*, and none are, so I shall denounce the man who has dared to wear our uniform."

"*Enrique Verona*, there has been some sad mistake, if you speak the truth, and I cannot doubt you. I am *Ysabel Merillo*."

"*Ysabel*, my darling, I intended to hunt this assemblage over for you. Come, take my arm."

"Have you heard enough to warn you of your danger? Come with me, or you are lost," cried the midshipman, as both he and *Launcelot Grenville* saw Captain *Verona* and *Ysabel* turn in their direction.

But, *Launcelot Grenville* remained firm, his arms folded upon his broad breast, and his somber eyes flashing through his mask.

As the gaze of *Enrique Verona* fell upon his counterpart, he started and his face turned pale, with a certain superstitious awe, while *Ysabel* said, faintly:

"See, there he stands, *Enrique! Santissima!* how much alike!"

All eyes were now turned upon the two officers, the one masked, the other unmasked, as they stood a few feet apart, the fair *Ysabel* hanging on the Mexican's arm, and the midshipman standing by the side of *Launcelot Grenville*.

"*Ysabel*," and Captain *Verona* spoke in a low tone: "Ysabel, there is but one man that I have ever seen whose form is as much like mine as is that person's, and whose face too must be alike also, as you bowed to him for me this afternoon, and that man it cannot be, unless—yes, he would dare anything."

Stepping quickly forward the Mexican said firmly, yet politely:

"Senior, as I happen to know that every officer of my regiment except myself is now on duty in the *Sierra Madre* mountains, I beg to know why you wear the *Lanceros* uniform, and who you are?"

The answer came in a deep, calm voice:

"Is this a request or a demand, senior?"

"A demand, if so you like it, senior," hotly returned the Mexican.

"Then I decline now to answer."

"And you refuse to unmask, too?"

"I do."

"By the Virgin! but you shall."

"Hold! this is no place for a scene, senior; but if you wish to see my face, and care to unmask me, we will go elsewhere."

There was something in the calm manner and cool tones of the masked man that restrained the fiery Mexican from his evident intention of unmasking the man before him, and he said, quickly:

"Anywhere you please, senior; lead the way."

Launcelot bowed and turned away, the midshipman clinging to his arm.

"Go to the orange grove, near the arbor," whispered the midshipman, and he dashed away in the throng.

Quietly *Launcelot Grenville* moved among the crowd, and, having left *Ysabel* on the arm of some other gallant, *Enrique Verona* followed.

"As this is a personal matter, senior, in which you consider yourself aggrieved by my wearing the uniform of your regiment, we will walk apart from lookers-on," said *Launcelot*.

But *Enrique Verona* hesitated, and seeing it, *Launcelot Grenville* continued:

"Do you fear to go alone with me, senior? You are armed."

"No, I fear no man; where will you go?" hotly replied the Mexican.

"Into the garden, if so it please you, senior."

The Mexican said something in a low tone to an officer in infantry uniform near him, and then aloud:

"Seniors, it is my request that we be not followed, for this gentleman may be able to prove he has a right to the uniform he wears, though I doubt it."

Then he bowed to *Launcelot Grenville*, and the two walked away together, the Mexican leading the way to an orange grove not far distant from the mansion.

"Now, senior, I demand that you unmask," and the Mexican turned upon his counterpart.

There was a new moon and it shone brightly upon the masked face of *Launcelot Grenville*, who said, indifferently:

"I care not to unmask, senior; if you demand it, you have a sword, so enforce the demand."

The Mexican sprang forward with a malediction upon his lips, and said:

"Then I'll tear your mask from your face."

But a blow of iron sent him reeling backward, and with a cry of rage he drew his sword and rushed upon the man before him, who caught the blade upon his own, and by one skillful movement sent it from the Mexican's hand.

"*Por Dios!* you shall not escape, for I know you now. None other could disarm me. Help, *Senor Rafael!* This man is *Grenville*, the pirate!"

At his words two men sprang from the shadow of the arbor, one of them being the infantry officer to whom *Enrique Verona* had spoken on leaving the mansion, and the other in naval attire, and both with swords drawn, as they rushed forward at the call of the *Lancero* captain.

CHAPTER XX.

A DEBT REPAID.

"Coward! take that!"

The words broke from the angry lips of *Launcelot Grenville* at the treachery of *Enrique Verona*, in having others follow them to the orange grove, and as he spoke he dashed the hilt of his sword full in the already bruised face of the *Lancero*, while he said, quickly:

"Were it not that that sweet girl, *Ysabel Merillo*, loves you, I would kill you."

But the blow fell heavily, and the Mexican, stunned and bleeding, sunk down in his tracks, while, turning upon his other assailants, *Launcelot Grenville* dashed aside the sword of one and drove his own weapon through his body.

Ere he could withdraw the blade the officer in naval uniform was upon him; but there came a sudden flash, a loud report, and the third Mexican fell in his tracks, while the midshipman, pistol in hand, sprang to the side of the man he had so nobly befriended.

"Come, senior, come quick, for the shot has alarmed the mansion. Throw this priest's robe around you," and the midshipman threw around *Launcelot's* shoulders a heavy mantle, and another about himself, while he drew him away toward a low wall, upon the other side of which stood two horses.

"Mount for your life, senior, and come!" cried the youth, and vaulting into the saddles they dashed away, just as *Enrique Verona* arose to his feet and cried in loud tones to the excited crowd hastening toward the spot:

"It is *Grenville* the pirate! Do not let him escape."

"I fear I have gotten you into trouble to-night, senior," said *Launcelot*, as the two galloped rapidly down the deserted streets.

"No, for not a soul will know me, and the way I take you there are none to see where I

go; but you had better have heeded my warning and stayed away from the commandante's ball."

"May I ask who you are that has served me so well?"

"One who owes you a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid," said the youth, feelingly.

"Whatever that debt may be, it is more than repaid by your act to-night. You have saved my life, and, for the sake of one being in the world, I would not die now."

"Here we are, and we are safe. Enter!" and the midshipman threw open a gate in a garden wall and both rode within.

Dismounting, the youth led the horses into a low stable and unsaddled them.

"Now, come with me," and the midshipman entered a massive door in a high wall, and which he had to unlock.

Launcelot Grenville stepped through the portal and started with surprise.

"This is the private garden of the *Senorita Delbanco*," he said, in surprise.

"And I am *Juanita Delbanco*, the Jewess," was the low reply.

"*Senorita!*" and the voice of *Launcelot Grenville* trembled, for he was deeply moved.

"*Senorita*, you are a noble woman, and I owe you my life—my escape from an ignominious death, and you have more than repaid the service I rendered you, years ago. Why you have done this I cannot tell, and your father—"

"My father knows nothing of my masquerade. I dreaded danger to you, and as I have been a perfect horsewoman since a child, I determined to aid you if I could, and fearing you might be recognized took the horses to the grove beyond the commandante's garden."

"I regret that blood had to be shed, but it could not be helped. Now I will give you a good disguise, and you must at once leave *Vera Cruz*. You will not refuse me this request?" and she looked up pleadingly into his face, while she tore off the silk mask she wore.

Removing his own mask *Launcelot* said, sadly: "I will do as you wish; but where is your father?"

"He must not know what I have done to-night, and, fortunately, he is away with a friend that is ill."

Leading the way into the house, *Juanita* showed the man whose life she had saved to a room, and excusing herself for a moment, soon returned with the suit of a fisherman, false beard and all.

Ten minutes after *Launcelot Grenville*, in his rude attire, joined *Juanita* in the elegantly-furnished *salon* where he had met her that afternoon.

"Farewell, *senorita!* and may you ever be happy will be my prayer."

"*Adios*, senior!" and the beautiful head was bowed, while *Launcelot Grenville* passed out into the street and the door closed behind him.

Secure in his disguise he walked briskly along, and soon knocked at the door of the little house where dwelt *Allene* with his little son.

"Oh, senior, I am so glad to see you, for the soldiers are looking for you everywhere," said the old Mexican woman, who opened the door for him.

"I intend leaving the city and came to say *adios*," and he crossed over to where *Allene* sat with the child in her lap.

"Oh, *Rais*, you are in danger," said the nurse. "I am always in danger, *Allene*," he answered, calmly, and bent over the babe, whose dark bright eyes turned upon him, and smiled, showing no fear of the rough beard and hair.

A moment the lonely, hunted man stood looking at the child, and then turned away.

"Let no harm befall my boy, *Allene*, whatever fate overtakes his father. You know where the *Treasure Isle* is, and the *Abyssinian* will show you where the riches are hidden, should death come to me. Farewell."

A moment after he had gone out into the streets now filled with soldiers and citizens hunting everywhere for the daring buccaneer, who had so recklessly entered a city where he was so well known—had gone to the commandante's ball and left two dead men as souvenirs of his visit, and a scar on the handsome face of *Enrique Verona*, Captain of *Lanceros*, that would go with him to the grave.

CHAPTER XXI.

AFTER THREE YEARS.

ONE morning in October, some three years after the branding of *Launcelot Grenville* as an outlaw and pirate, by the Mexican Government, the sentinel on the parapet of the *Castle San Juan de Ulea*, reported to the officer of the day that he heard distant firing at sea, and a messenger was sent up to *Vera Cruz*, to dispatch a gunboat then in port out to the scene.

The cruiser soon sped by the castle and headed seaward, while at the same time a sail hoisted in sight on the eastern horizon, but the sound of firing still continued, though growing fainter and fainter, until it could be no longer heard.

The vessel sighted lay, in the meantime, drawn above the horizon and was discovered to be a large ship flying the English flag, and evidently a merchantman though armed.

THE BUCCANEER ISLE.

pen to know that she was carrying a rich freight. Were there any women or children on board, senior?"

"I do not admit your right to question me regarding my captures, Captain Freelance," sullenly said the Spaniard.

"It is a right that I will take, senior, especially as you might be enriched by a ransom."

"Ah! No, there were no women and children on board—yes, one woman, the captain's wife, and another, the ship's stewardess."

"Well, what became of those two?"

"The captain's wife was killed, and the stewardess went on with the ship, which I released upon ransom."

"With all her crew and passengers?"

"Excepting a few I kept to serve me."

"Then there was no young girl on board?"

"No; you have made a mistake, senior."

"I think not; you make a mistake in keeping back the fact that you have a maiden captive, for whom you can get a very large ransom."

"I have no such captive, I tell you."

"Ricardo, you lie in your false throat, and I swear to you, if you have harmed the maiden, I will swing you up to the yard-arm of your own vessel."

Freelance spoke in deadly earnest, and in an instant both men were upon their feet, Ricardo livid with rage.

"*Caramba!* Do you dare me in my own den?" he yelled.

"Yes, I have come here for that maiden, and I will have her. If dead, or harm has befallen her, you shall die!"

Ricardo attempted to draw a pistol, but like a flash Freelance struck it from his hand with his sword.

"You are in my power, Ricardo, and our quarrel must be settled now and here. I have offered you ransom for a captive, and you refuse it."

"I tell you I know of no such captive. There is a nun that I took some weeks ago on the way to Havana from New Orleans, and she is the only woman worthy of ransom that I have."

"Again I say you lie! and I am determined to have the captive or your life."

"Captain Freelance, you are wild. I have but to give an alarm and a score of men will hurl themselves upon you."

"Sound that alarm and it will be your death-knell, for I will run you through the heart."

The savage buccaneer quailed, and his hand on his cutlass-hilt trembled, for he felt that he was in the power of a dangerous man; so he said, whiningly:

"Captain Freelance, you hold the advantage over me."

"Do I? Well, call your men, and I pledge you I will not harm you."

In surprise at his change of tactics, and yet half-doubting, Ricardo placed a whistle to his lips and gave a shrill blast.

Instantly the sounds of running feet were heard approaching; but with a smile upon his lips, and folded arms, Freelance stood silently awaiting their coming.

The next moment a number of men came down a path at a run and halted by the cabin, drawn cutlasses in their hands.

"Men, I caused your captain to call you, for he seemed afraid to be alone with me, and I wished you to hear what I have to say."

"You mistake, senior; I fear no man," yelled Ricardo, emboldened by the presence of his men.

Freelance smiled, and continued:

"I came here, my lads, to ransom a lady whom your captain holds captive, and as he says she is not here, and I know that she fell into his hands, I now challenge him to meet me face to face as a man, and if I fall by his hands, yonder vessel is his, and my crew shall yield him allegiance; if he falls by my hand, then I shall be your chief. Captain Ricardo, you can select your own weapons."

Ricardo at once saw how he had been entrapped by Freelance, for he well knew that he must fight or forever lose caste with his men, as they would look upon him as a coward and brand him as such.

It was too late now to regret having called the men, and he was in a quandary what to do; but jumped, like a drowning man, at a straw.

"Captain Freelance, I will give you full permission to search the island, and if you find the lady here you may have her without ransom," he said.

"No, for if she is not here, you have gotten rid of her. You shall meet me, or I shall brand you before your crew as a base coward. Am I not fair, men?"

"Ay, ay, senior!" yelled the men in chorus, and Ricardo saw that the seed sown was already bringing forth but fruit against him, for his men knew him to be a desperate hand with the sword, for he was both powerful and skillful; besides, he was very unpopular as a commander, and many hoped that Freelance would kill him and become their chief, for they did not all possess the brutal nature of their savage captain.

"Ricardo, we will adjourn to the beach, and there our duel can be witnessed by your men and mine. Come!"

Freelance turned away, and Ricardo was

tempted to strike him in the back, but he knew his own men would at once turn against him, while, although Freelance was a dangerous adversary, he hoped that he might slay him in the hand-to-hand conflict which he now felt was unavoidable.

Slowly toward the beach the two leaders and the crew moved, and messengers were sent to gather all to the scene of combat, while Freelance hailed his schooner and bade his men come ashore.

In wonder and excitement the buccaneers flocked to the spot, where Ricardo stood with livid face and somewhat nervous manner, and Freelance paced to and fro, a cigar between his lips.

As the eager crowd peered around Freelance said, as he glanced over the numerous faces:

"Lads, Captain Ricardo and myself have a cause of quarrel between us, and I have challenged him to fight it out with any weapons he may desire: am I right?"

A cheer from the crowd answered, and throwing aside his uniform coat, in which he delighted to make display, and taking a sword, handed him by a buccaneer lieutenant, Ricardo signified his readiness to meet Freelance, who advanced upon him rapidly, his own blade on guard, and his dark eyes flashing fire.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BATTLE OF THE BUCCANEERS.

As Freelance advanced to the attack upon Ricardo, the crews of the different leaders gathered around with the deepest interest to see these two rival buccaneers settle the quarrel between them with the sword.

The followers of Ricardo knew Freelance well by name, and he had the reputation of being a kind-hearted and generous leader, though a severe disciplinarian, and the manner in which he was driven to buccaneering by outlawry they were acquainted with, while his capture of one of Lafitte's fastest schooners some years before, his running the desperate gantlet past the Castle de Uloa, and many other tales of his great courage and prowess, were common forecastle stories.

On the other hand, self-interest and protection held many of them under the leadership of Ricardo, whom most of them hated, while only a few of his own cruel kind cared to remain with him from choice.

As for the crew of Freelance they respected and admired him, for his wounded were never thrown into the sea as useless, after having nobly fought for him, but taken care of, and, though a bold sea robber, striking wherever there were spoils to gain, or a battle to be won, and apparently loving scenes of desperate conflict, yet they had never known him to be intentionally cruel, but one who punished all acts of inhumanity severely.

A man whose life was a mystery to them, and one whom they felt had suffered much, he was full of inconsistencies of character, for a lion in battle, he was womanly in his softness of manner to the defenseless, and sympathetic to those in distress; and the insulter of a woman, or one who harmed a child in his presence, was certain to feel the deadly weight of his sword.

As the two blades came together the sparks flew from the steel, and seemingly in the first stroke both men had measured the strength of each other.

Taller than his opponent, heavier by far, and possessed of great strength, Ricardo had little dreaded the combat, for he was ambitious to become the commander of the swift and stanch vessel of Freelance, and thereby add to his protection from cruisers; but, when he threw all his power into his arm, and felt that his adversary's blade did not yield, he became aware that he had met his match physically, and must conquer wholly by his skill as a swordsman, and his face showed that he intended some cunning device with the weapon of which he certainly was master.

As for Freelance his face bore its habitual stern, unmoved look; but his eyes seemed to read his antagonist, and every feint made by him was anticipated and parried.

Seeing that their leaders appeared to be equally matched, the men became more excited and crowded around, forming a small ring in which the fierce struggle was going on, while upon the hillside, some distance off, a small group were witnessing the battle of the giants.

From having acted upon the defensive, and leading not only Ricardo but the men to believe that he was not the equal of his ferocious antagonist, Freelance suddenly began the offensive to the surprise of all, and a cheer went up from his own crew, which was joined in by many of the Island Buccaneers.

At this new exhibition of his enemy's skill, Ricardo's evil face turned livid once more, and he fought with the ferocity of desperation; but steadily he was pressed back, the crowd giving way, until, throwing his whole strength and skill into his movements, Freelance beat down the weapon of his antagonist and drove his own blade through his body.

A cry, like that of a wild beast in fright and pain, broke from the bloodless lips of Ricardo, and, as he fell to the earth in a heap, he yelled, with savage viciousness:

"Cut the dog in pieces, you gaping devils! cut him down, I say, for he has killed me!"

A number of his crew sprung forward as though to obey, when, in trumpet tones, the voice of Freelance arose above the din and confusion:

"Hold! don't press me, devils!"

As he spoke, with drawn sword and pistol in the other hand, he confronted those who were antagonistic to him, and they shrunk back before his blazing eyes.

"Cowards! if you fear to avenge your chief, I will revenge myself."

As the dying Ricardo spoke, he threw forward a pistol he had drawn from his bosom and pulled the trigger, ere Freelance could turn upon him.

But, suddenly, a slender form darted forward and kicked up the muzzle of the weapon, and the bullet went above the head of the man for whom it was aimed, while Ricardo, with a bitter oath, sunk back in the agonies of death.

"Ha, my fine fellow, you turned that ball from my heart. Henceforth we are friends," and Freelance turned toward the one who had kicked up the pistol that had been so well aimed, and saw before him a youth of eighteen, with black curling hair, cutshort, and a face that was strikingly handsome, while a slight mustache shaded his mouth.

He was dressed in white duck pants, and a dark, loose sack coat, and wore a jaunty sailor cap.

Now, as the youth grasped the hand extended to him, he hung his head, and seemed confused, and answered, in a low tone, when asked who he was:

"I am cabin-boy on the vessel of Captain Ricardo, senior."

"You are young for a buccaneer, and do not look like one accustomed to scenes of a wild nature."

"I am a captive, senior, and not from choice one of the pirate band," was the low reply.

"He was taken on the Sea Gull packet ship, I heard yer axin' about, yer honor," said an Englishman, advancing.

"Ah!" and Freelance gazed more intently into the face of the youth, and said, kindly:

"Go on board my vessel, my boy; I will soon be there."

The youth turned away, and Freelance stepped forward and leant over Ricardo.

"He is dead. Men, those who do not wish to serve under me, say so frankly, and you can leave the island in one of those prize vessels yonder," and he faced the sea of faces gazing upon him.

There was a moment's silence, and then, as no dissenting voice was heard, one of Ricardo's lieutenants cried:

"A bravo, lads, for Captain Freelance!"

Instantly a wild cheer went up from the crowd, and raising his hat, Freelance said, as he turned to the buccaneer officer who had so promptly sided with him, and who was an old, gray-haired Spaniard who had doubtless been born to a far different life from the one he followed:

"*Gracias, senior*; I will make you commander of this island, which I will make my stronghold; and, Senior Miguel!"

"*Si senior capitán*," and the young lieutenant stepped forward.

"I place you in command of Ricardo's vessel," and calling to the youth, who had not yet gone on board the schooner, he continued:

"I would see the captives that Ricardo brought here, my boy."

"I will lead you to them—they are there on the hillside, senior," and the youth pointed to the little group that had watched the combat with such interest.

There were not a dozen of them—a few men who were held for ransom, others whom Ricardo had not known what to do with, and an officer of the United States navy, captured on board the Sea Gull.

"My friends, you shall be at once set free, and given money to reach your homes—for, though a buccaneer, I am not a monster."

A cry of thanks went up from all, while the naval officer stepped forward and said:

"Senior, I have been told that you are Freelance the Freebooter; in fact, I recognized your flag and schooner, for I have often met you in my cruises."

"I am Freelance, sir," was the quiet answer.

"Then you have been shamefully maligned, for rumor makes you out very different man from what you are," and there were admiration and respect in the officer's glance as he gazed upon the splendid-looking man before him.

"I am what cruel Fate has made me, sir—a free rover, a hunted man," and he turned abruptly to the youth:

"Are these all of Ricardo's captives, my lad?"

"Excepting myself, senior, and one other, a nun, who is in the cabin in the valley."

"I will seek her. My friends, go on board my schooner at once, for I will sail to night and place you on the first inward bound vessel we meet," and Freelance walked toward the cabins in the valley, followed by the youth, who seemed not to wish to leave his side.

"My lad, run on and tell the good lady that Freelance would see her, but to dread nothing." The youth dashed ahead and entered one of the huts, while Freelance followed more leisurely.

As he approached the door a woman, clad in the dress of a nun, stepped out of the cabin, and the long veil being thrown back the eyes of the two met.

A wild cry broke from the lips of the man, and he staggered back, covering his face with his hands, as though to shut out some hideous specter, while the woman sunk down upon the ground in a deep swoon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NUN.

COMPLETELY taken aback by the unexpected recognition between Freelance and the nun, the youth hardly knew what to do; but seeing that the latter most needed his aid he sprung to her side, and raised her head from the ground.

It was a strangely beautiful face, white and pure as marble, and inexpressibly sad, that met the view, and bending over her the youth gazed with a strange interest upon her, while a few feet away stood Freelance, his hands still over his eyes, and his form trembling.

"Senor, the lady needs aid. There is water in the cabin," said the youth, hoping to arouse him.

Instantly the buccaneer sprang forward, and, kneeling, drew the form of the nun toward him, while he muttered, in an absent way:

"I believed her dead; I believed her dead, yet she lives—lives, yet as she is, dead to me—dead to me!"

Relieved of his burden the young man ran into the cabin and soon returned with a vase of water and began to bathe the white face.

A sigh, a gasp and the eyes opened and met those of the youth bending over her.

"It was a dream then; he is not a pirate—no, no, he could not be so vile," she murmured, and then her glance suddenly rested upon the man in whose arms she was supported.

With a bound she was upon her feet, her hands warning him off, as she cried:

"Oh, blessed Virgin, it is too true, too true!—he is the monster, Freelance."

"Lucille!"

The name was breathed softly, and Freelance made an imploring gesture.

"Back! back, sir pirate! how dare your polluted hands touch me! Do you not see I am in the robe of one who has yielded up forever the world and its follies?"

"Lucille, hear me say that I thank the God to whom you kneel in prayer, that you live—that your death lies not upon my hands, as I have thought since that fearful night."

"No, I drove the dagger to my own bosom. Would to God it had killed me, for then I would have never known that Launcelot Grenville had become a buccaneer—that the man I once loved as I did my soul had won the infamous name of Freelance, the Freebooter."

The voice trembled, and the eyes were lowered as she spoke, and the man answered, sadly:

"Lucille, I offer no palliation for my deeds. I was the toy of an evil destiny, and have blindly followed wherever Fate led me—followed it to my sorrow, and the loss of my soul; but, until the day your father fell by my hand—"

"Hold! Launcelot Grenville, I never knew for a long time—no, not until I was recovering from the wound I gave myself, that night at my father's grave, that you had acted nobly in that fatal meeting, and twice spared my father's life."

"In my wild grief I was ungenerous to you, and I cursed you, for my love turned to hatred; but that is past now, and since then I have mourned you as dead—and dead you are to me, now."

Unconsciously she had repeated the very words he had spoken of her, and a shudder shook her frame as she looked up and caught his eyes fixed upon her.

"Thank Heaven, you do me justice in that act, Lucille," he said, earnestly.

"I do more than justice, Launcelot; I forgive you."

He would have sprung to her side, but her look held him at bay, and he said, in a voice hardly audible:

"From my inmost heart I thank you, Lucille; I had, as the slayer of your father, believed that I was your destroyer, too, after we met that night at his grave, and bitter indeed has been the cup of misery held to my lips ever since; but now life's horizon is brightening for me, and—"

"Hold! Launcelot Grenville, can the horizon of life ever brighten for Freelance the Pirate?"

Her voice rung out clear, and upon her face was a look of scorn, which the guilty man dare not meet, and he bowed his head in an agony of shame.

After a moment, he spoke:

"No, I had forgotten, in my joy at seeing you alive, and receiving your forgiveness, who I was—no, there is no hope, no brightness in my life—only gloom and despair."

She felt that her words had crushed out a new-born hope, and there was deep pity in her

heart, as she stepped to his side and laid her hand upon his arm.

"You reproach me for my words, Launcelot, and I ask you to forgive them; but oh, for years, even in the convent walls, have been told stories of Freelance the Freebooter and his deeds—no, no, they cannot be true—you are not, cannot be the hideous monster they have painted you."

"Lucille, I am bad enough, God knows, but I am not as bad as the world would make me; my hands are red with the blood of my fellow-beings, and the treasure I have won is dyed with the current of human life; yet I could be worse, I could be worse."

He shook off the hand upon his arm and turned away, to instantly again confront her:

"You have forever given up the world, Lucille?"

"Yes. I went into a convent as soon as I recovered from my wound."

"You are at what convent?"

"I was sent to Havana, but am now returning to the Convent des Ursulines at New Orleans."

"I will restore you to your cloister, and will give to you a vast sum of gold for charity."

"It is blood-stained, Captain Freelance."

"All gold is blood-stained, and all gold is accursed, even that which goes into the coffers of the church," he said, almost savagely.

Then he added, coldly:

"Whenever you are ready to go on board the schooner I am at your service."

"Launcelot, you are angry with me now. Forgive me, and forget that I have crossed your path again; only, and I entreat you by the past, and by your mother's memory—by the memory of your father whom my father placed in his grave, and by your hope of a hereafter, to cease this life you lead!"

She placed both hands upon his shoulders, and gazed up into his dark face entreatingly, and for a moment he seemed deeply moved; then he said, hoarsely:

"The past cannot be wiped out; the tears of myriads of angels could never wash out my sins; as I have sown, so will I reap! I am dead to the world, Lucille, and myself. Come!"

He offered his arm, but she shrunk from him, but slowly walked by his side, having drawn her veil around over her face.

Behind them, a few paces, came the youth, whose presence seemed to have been forgotten by both of them.

Arriving upon the beach the men gave three cheers for their new chief, and Lucille shrunk away and walked hurriedly to the boat in waiting.

Giving his orders to the island commander, and to Alvez Miguel, who was to remain in the harbor until his chief's return, Freelance sprang into the boat, and ten minutes after the schooner was standing out of the inlet under easy sail, and heading toward the open sea; while upon her decks were the rescued captives, happy in their escape from the power of Ricardo.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FATAL SHOT

"SAIL HO!"

It was the cry of the look-out from the mast-head of the buccaneer schooner, the morning after leaving the island stronghold.

Freelance was pacing the deck, and had, through the whole night, been keeping up that monotonous walk, while his passengers, as he called Ricardo's captives, slept in his cabin below.

No, not all of them, for one lay awake listening to that firm, steady tread on the deck, and well knowing whose step it was, and it echoed dismally in her poor heart, and sent her thoughts flying back to the long ago on the Mississippi shores, and bitter, scalding tears filled her eyes, as she compared that past with the present.

"Sail ho!"

The cry was repeated ere Launcelot looked up, and turned his glass upon the white wing far away on the horizon.

Steadily he watched it as it increased in size, and the topsails of a large brig became visible.

"She does not look like a merchantman, sir; but if she is, I will place you all on board of her," said Freelance, handing his glass to the naval officer, who replied, after a searching look at the stranger:

"No, Captain Freelance, she has a cruiser-like look from her top-lamper; but could you not approach under flag of truce?"

"No nation, sir, will respect a pirate's flag of truce," shortly answered Freelance, and he added:

"I hope she is a merchant, for I know you are anxious to be well rid of such company as you meet on the deck of a buccaneer."

"You certainly should feel proud of your vessel and crew, as far as appearances go, captain, for there is no better discipline in our navy."

"I have to rule with an iron hand, sir, or be ruled: the commander of a buccaneer craft carries his life in his hand; let him waver and he is lost. I believe that yonder vessel is really a merchant craft, running in to New Orleans. I will head toward her," and the schooner was at

once put away so as to cross the bows of the strange sail.

At this maneuver of the buccaneer the stranger instantly fell off from her course, more sail was spread, and she darted away in flight.

"She is not a fighter, Captain Renforth! You will soon cease to be a pirate's guest, for my schooner will show you how she can run. Crowd on sail, Senor Hernandez," cried Freelance, addressing the officer who had taken Alvez Miguel's place, and who had been the senior lieutenant of Ricardo.

Under the pressure of canvas the schooner fairly flew through the waters, and although the brig was a rapid sailer began to overhaul her.

"That fellow looks as though he had teeth. I hope he is not playing a game on me, for I would dislike to have a fight with guests on board," said Freelance.

Nearer and nearer the schooner drew to the brig, until little over half a league separated them, and the passengers who had come on deck were expecting soon to be out from under the shadow of the black flag.

"Your glass, please, Captain Freelance," suddenly said Captain Renforth.

It was handed him and he bent a long and searching glance upon the brig, after which he said:

"Captain Freelance, did I not warn you of danger I would not do my duty toward a man who has rescued myself and friends from a cruel captivity, has treated us with the greatest kindness, and is now running his head into the hangman's halter to serve us; yonder craft is an American brig-of-war."

"I half thought so, and I thank you, Captain Renforth; you have proven yourself a true and humane man. Fire a gun over the brig, Senor Hernandez, and run up our colors," coolly said Freelance, showing no emotion at the startling news.

"What! you cannot mean to fight him?" cried Captain Renforth.

"We are near enough to feel his weight, Captain Renforth, and as we will have to fight I may as well capture him, and then place you on board and send you to New Orleans, where he would doubtless go to repair damages."

At that instant the gun flashed over the schooner's bows, and the gold lance flag and red anchor ensign arose together into the air.

Instantly the brig swept round; the stars and stripes went up to her peak, and the drums beat "to quarters."

"I warned you, Captain Freelance; I have done my duty," said Captain Renforth, and he added, as the buccaneer crew stripped the schooner for action, and went to their guns:

"That is the Dolphin brig-of-war, twenty-two guns, and commanded by an officer lately promoted for gallant conduct against the Moorish and Algerine corsairs; his name is Arthur Grenville."

At that moment a cry broke from the lips of Lucille the nun, who stood near, and Freelance said, hoarsely:

"In Heaven's name! who did you say?"

"Captain Arthur Grenville."

"Stand ready, all! Ready about! Leave your guns, you devils, and crowd the canvas on until you run the schooner under!"

All were startled by the ringing, almost wild tones of Freelance, as he issued his orders, and the crew sprung to their posts with an alacrity that sent the schooner round as though on a pivot, while the extra sail, shortly before taken in, was spread again, and the swift vessel drove through the sea with fearful velocity.

As for Captain Renforth he knew not what to make of the sudden change in the plans of Freelance, but felt that it was no fear to meet the brig, only that the name of Arthur Grenville had in some way struck terror to his heart.

In the meantime the brig was not idle, but had swept about, too, and was crowding sail in hot pursuit.

Seeing that she was going to open fire, Freelance requested his guests to go below, and they did so, excepting Captain Renforth and the youth, who stood by the side of the chief.

A moment more and the puff came from the brig's bows, and the shot came flying after the schooner.

Then, hot and fast the cruiser poured in a fire upon the flying buccaneer, some of the shots telling upon the rigging, crew and hull, for they were well aimed.

Calmly, and with a smile hard to fathom upon his face, Freelance stood gazing at the approaching vessel, while his crew looked upon him, wondering why he did not hit back at the brig.

"You do not return the fire of the brig, sir," said Captain Renforth as the murmuring of the men reached his ears.

"No, I will never fire upon yonder vessel," was the stern reply.

The men heard his words, and their voices grew louder, while a shot sent crashing through forward, dropped several of their number dead upon the deck.

Instantly they pressed aft, and an angry voice exclaimed:

"Captain Freelance, we won't be shot down."

like dogs, when, if you give the word, we can capture yonder craft."

"Silence, and back to your posts you mutinous hounds, or by the blue sky above us, I'll lay to, and surrender this schooner to yonder brig, and put my neck in the noose with yours."

The men saw the blazing eyes, and they knew the weight of that single arm, and, one voice cried:

"The capt'in knows best, lads; he'll fetch us through all right."

Quietly the men shrunk back, and stood calmly at their posts, while the brig's shot flew dangerously near their heads; but the schooner was gradually forging ahead, and if not hit in a vital spot, would soon be out of range.

Suddenly a shot crashed through the deck, just beneath the feet of Freelance, and a moment after a deep groan came from the cabin.

"The nun is wounded and would see you, sir," said one of the passengers, poking his scared face up out of the companionway.

"Great God! Lucille, am I doomed to lead you to death?" groaned Freelance, and he quickly descended into the cabin.

There, upon a divan stained with her life-blood, lay Lucille the nun, a splinter having pierced her side.

That she was dying there was no doubt, and with an effort she held forth her hand to Freelance as he entered.

"Launcelot, the end has come. I thank Heaven that it is so, for I was tempted, in seeing you once more, to forget the past, forget what you are and—love—you."

She spoke in a low tone audible to him alone, as he knelt by her side and grasped her hand.

"Oh, Lucille, do not speak of the past, and for the future I have no hope," he said, sadly.

"Launcelot—promise me—oh, God! I have not the strength to ask you—" a shudder passed over her, her face became ashen in hue, and one word broke from her lips as the breath left her body—the saddest of all words—farewell."

The haughty head of the pirate chief was bowed for an instant and in hoarse tones he muttered:

"At last! at last! one by one they go and I am left—why?"

Throwing a silken scarf over the face, Freelance returned to the deck and mechanically swept his eyes around him.

The brig was still firing upon the schooner, but her last shot that had struck had been the fatal one, for the distance was now becoming too great for the range of the guns.

"I heard that the beautiful nun is badly wounded, Captain Freelance."

"She is dead, sir," said Freelance, in reply to Captain Renforth.

"Sail ho!" rung out from the fore-top, and just in their course was a large vessel heading toward them; but soon after the schooner was discovered by the stranger and immediately put away in rapid flight.

"Yonder craft is a merchantman, Captain Renforth, so you and your friends will soon be upon an honest deck," said Freelance, and so rapidly did the schooner gain upon the chase that within two hours after being discovered a shot was sent after her, and taking the hint she lay to.

"Her commander evidently thinks you are a cruiser, Captain Freelance, or he would have stood on longer," said Captain Renforth.

In a minute a boat was launched and manned and the passengers went over the side into it, each thanking Freelance for his kindness to them, while Captain Renforth said:

"The Government shall know of you as you are Captain Freelance, and I hope we may meet again. Good-by."

The two men grasped hands, and the next moment the boat pulled to the side of the ship.

"Hasten back, coxswain, for if we delay we will get under range of the brig once more," called out Freelance, and the men pulled with a will, and soon returned, having left the passengers on board.

"Now lay her on her course again—head for Vera Cruz," ordered Freelance, and he descended into the cabin, to start back, suddenly.

"You here? Why did you not go with the others?"

It was the youth he addressed, and he sat by the side of the dead Lucille.

"I preferred to remain with you, senor," was the low reply.

"My poor boy, a buccaneer's craft is not the place for one like you," said Freelance, kindly.

"Nor you, senor."

"True; but go on deck, and tell the Senor Hernandez to have all ready for the burial of this lady as soon as it is dark."

The youth left the cabin, and Freelance took his seat by the side of the beautiful corpse, his hand resting upon hers, and his eyes gazing listlessly out of the stern port.

Thus sitting, he saw the merchant vessel lay to and await the coming up of the brig-of-war, commanded by his own brother, Arthur Grenville—that brother who, on the coast of Africa, years before, he had so befriended, and whom, though he had never harmed him by word or deed, he cared never again to meet, for he shrunk from the thought with horror that he should be

known as a pirate, and bring shame upon his proud name.

Attentively regarding the two vessels, he saw a boat pass to and fro between them, and then they both got under way again and shaped their course, apparently, for New Orleans, the brig having given up the chase.

"Can he know that I command this vessel?"

"No, that were impossible, I think, as he believes me dead. He has seen that it is useless to attempt to catch my schooner, fleet as is his vessel," and Freelance gazed out over the waters at the fading brig-of-war until twilight settled down upon the sea, and he could no longer discern an outline of the vessel that held his brother.

Then out of the Gulf arose the moon, sending a pathway of golden light across the rippling waves, yet only deepening the sadness in the heart of the hunted man.

Upon the lounge lay the dead form of Lucille Darrington, her white face lighted up by the rays of moonlight that came through the stern ports.

With a groan of bitter agony he dropped down beside the woman who had been the first love of his life, and his strong form shook with emotion.

"Dead! dead! and through my act! Oh, Heaven! what a curse rests upon me, for my hand blights every being it touches, and my love is more to be feared by them than my hatred."

"Poor girl! She survived that fearful wound, given by her own hand at the grave of her father that night, to die here in my presence; she escaped the dangers of being the prisoner of that monster Ricardo, to meet her death upon my vessel when I sought to save her—ay, and die by the fire ordered by my own brother."

"Oh, God! it seems as though were I to go mad it would be a relief from the tortures I suffer, for Fate drives me on with cruel lash and there is no rest for me here on earth—ay, and will there be hereafter?"

For a few moments he was silent, and then he added, in a subdued tone:

"Poor Lucille! Now we must part forever, and the deep sea shall be your resting-place."

Then springing to his feet he cried:

"No, no, no, the sea shall not receive your fair form—I will do it!"

"Ho! the deck!" he suddenly called out.

Lieutenant Hernandez immediately appeared in the companionway.

"Senor, head at once for Lake Pontchartrain, and crowd the schooner from deck to truck with canvas!"

"Ay, ay, senor capitan," answered the lieutenant, and the schooner was at once put away for the destination ordered, and getting the wind free bounded along at a nine-knot pace.

CHAPTER XXVI. THE MIDNIGHT BURIAL.

THE surf fell with a low, moaning sound upon the Mississippi shores, and the light wind only now and then formed a wave into a snowy cap, which broke into diamond showers under the bright moonlight.

The long sweep of the dark shores, lighted up here and there with the villa of the planter, was as quiet as the grave, except when the long howl of some sleepless watch-dog echoed through the forest, and was answered by the deep bay of a bound on the neighboring plantation.

It was nearing the midnight hour, and the lights had disappeared from the windows of the villas, and no sign of life was visible upon the land.

Yet, upon the sea a white sail was seen—a schooner gliding shoreward like some huge phantom of the waves, and heading for a cove formed by a point of land that jutted out into the Gulf.

Nearer and nearer the vessel came, until, when within a few cables' length of the white beach, it luffed up into the wind and lay rocking upon the tiny waves.

A few moments after a large boat put out from its side, urged on by eight oarsmen with slow, steady stroke.

In the stern-sheets sat two forms, while between them rested a coffin, the rude casket that was to be consigned to the earth with the remains of some loved one.

Presently the boat grated upon the shore, and the two men in the stern-sheets sprung out upon the sands, while four of the oarsmen gently raised the coffin and stood awaiting in silence.

"Come!"

It was the taller of the two men who had been seated in the stern of the boat that spoke, and his voice was deep and stern, and his face cold and white, as the moonlight fell upon it.

Leading the way, his companion by his side, and followed by the bearers of the coffin, and oarsmen bringing up the rear, he ascended the pathway to the cliff above, and halted a moment in a small grove of pines.

But only the sighing of the wind through the trees, and the dirge-like fall of the waves upon the shore were heard, and he walked slowly on.

Coming to a highway he again paused and glanced up and down, as though expecting, or

dreading to see some midnight traveler; but not a moving object met the eye, and the little cortege again walked on with solemn tread.

Passing through a gateway, crumbling with age, the leader, as though knowing every step of the way, led on through the weed-grown paths of what had once been a beautiful garden, and skirted around the mansion which stood dark, gloomy and silent as the tomb, a short distance away.

Crossing an open lawn, now rank with wild grass, the party soon disappeared in the shadows of a grove of willow, cedar and arbovitae trees.

But the moonlight struggled through the foliage and glimmered upon white marble tombs, showing that the lonely spot was a burying-ground.

"Halt!"

The men obeyed the order and placed the rudely-made coffin upon the ground.

"Here, men, get to work; dig the grave here!"

The four oarsmen, who had been carrying spades and shovels upon their backs, came forward to the designated spot and began to dig a grave beside one which was overgrown with weeds, showing that no loving hand had been near to keep it green.

One little ray of light fell upon the tomb, and rested upon the name of Fred Darrington, showing who it was that lay beneath the weed-grown mound.

Quickly the men threw up the dark loam, while their comrades stood in silence around, all impressed by the scene.

Apart, gazing upon the coffin, his arms folded upon his breast, stood Freelance, and the youth who was at his side started as he heard the words break unconsciously from his lips:

"When I placed that man in his grave I wrecked my whole future life."

Deep down into the earth dug the seamen, until the coxswain approached his chief and said that all was ready.

"Lower the coffin into the grave, coxswain, and then fill it up," was the low order, and there was a tremor in the voice, in spite of the self-command of the speaker.

"No, no, though I am not one of her faith, I know the burial service for the dead; let me repeat it over her grave."

It was the youth who spoke, and he gazed up earnestly into the face of the chief.

"You!"

"Yes, I am but a boy; but I hate to see her shut forever from human sight without some words of burial at her grave."

The stern man started, and a sneer momentarily curled his lip; but his better nature conquered, and he said, in a kindly tone:

"Go on, boy. Hold, coxswain; this youth will repeat the service for the dead."

As he spoke he removed his hat, and the men at once doffed their tarpaulins, while the youth stepped to the head of the open grave, into which the coffin was lowered as tenderly as though the form within was yet alive.

Then in a voice that trembled slightly, but which was distinct and impressive, the youth repeated the burial-service of the Episcopal church, and to the surprise of all, at the words, "Earth to earth, and ashes to ashes," Freelance stooped and threw upon the coffin handfuls of loose dirt, which fell with a hollow, mournful sound that sent a chill through the hearts of even the reckless men who stood grouped near with uncovered heads.

At last the youth's voice died away and a dead silence fell upon all, which was broken by the long, mournful howl of a dog at a neighboring plantation.

"Fill in the grave!" said Freelance, unconsciously starting at the dismal sound, and the men, seemingly anxious to leave the spot, shoveled in the loose earth, and the grave was soon complete.

Turning to the youth, whom he had named Skip, upon account of his bright and graceful way of moving, Freelance said:

"Lead the men back to the boat, and await me there."

Taking up their shovels the men slowly departed, leaving their chief gazing sadly upon the newly-made mound.

When they were gone he drew from beneath his heavy cloak a wooden cross, and into which was carved most skillfully the following inscription:

"IN MEMORY OF

"LUCILLE.

"Keep yourselves from Idols."

This cross he placed at the head of the grave, and then strode away with quick, firm tread, his eyes cast down, his lips set.

At the highway he paused and said, sadly:

"Oh, that I dared visit my boyhood's home; No, no it would unman me; iron heart that I have, it would make me a weak child again. Ha!"

He darted suddenly back into the shadow of the gloria-mundi hedge that bordered the road, and crouched down in silence, as a horseman appeared in sight, coming toward him at a slow

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that, his eyes turned upon the white sails of the schooner lying in the cove.

"It is Bernard Lysle," came in a hiss through the shut teeth of Freelance, and he arose to his feet and grasped a pistol firmly in his hand.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REVENGE IS SWEET.

"HALT! or I fire!"

Startlingly clear and threatening the stern order came upon the crisp air, frightening both steed and rider.

But, before the horseman could dash away an iron-like grasp was upon his bridle-rein his horse was hurled back upon his haunches, and at the rider's heart pointed the muzzle of a long dueling pistol.

Taken at a disadvantage the horseman had but one alternative—to surrender, and he said, in trembling tones:

"I will not resist, my good fellow; but what means this attack on the highway?"

He was a man verging on fifty, and possessed of a large form, and a face that was stamped with a certain look of cruelty and cunning.

Well dressed, and mounted upon a fine animal, he was evidently a man of wealth, and supposed that a desire to rob him had caused him to be thus halted.

"Bernard Lysle, it means that you are known to me, and Fate, ever cruel to me, has been most kind to me to-night, in leading you into my power."

"In God's name who are you, and how have I harmed you?" cried the now thoroughly alarmed man.

"Ha! ha! have the years of crime which I have led so changed my face that you fail to recognize the man whom you hated when he was a mere boy, because he opposed your marriage with his mother?"

"Heaven have mercy! You are Launcelot Grenville," almost groaned the man; then he added quickly: "I thought you were dead."

"It would have been well for you had I been dead. Yes, Bernard Lysle, I am Launcelot Grenville that was; now I have buried that name forever, as I have another which suits me better."

"I do not understand you, my dear Launcelot; you talk wildly, and do not seem well."

"Coward! you fear me, and doubtless deem me mad; but that I am not mad is not your fault, for you it was who made me what I am, and so desired to put me out of the way that you caused me to be accused of a crime too base to dwell on—caused me to be tried for my brother's life, and, sitting in judgment upon me, you so influenced the jury that they brought in a verdict of guilty against me—ay, and you it was that sentenced me to be hung for having slain Arthur Grenville, who came back after my flight to face you and hurl the lie into the teeth of my accusers."

"Forgive me, Launcelot; I decided with the evidence, and God knows I am sorry for it all, and delighted that you escaped from the terrible death I sentenced you to."

"Your words are false as your heart, Judge Lysle; but come, dismount and go with me."

"Where?" asked the now thoroughly alarmed man.

"Do you see yonder schooner in the basin?"

"Yes."

"That is my vessel; I would have you accompany me there."

"Then you are still in the Mexican service, Launcelot, for I notice that it is a vessel-of-war?"

"No, I serve only myself and my crew; I have no home but my deck, go with the winds from north to south, from east to west, follow no man's lead, and own no country or flag."

"Great heavens! you cannot mean that—"

"Have you ever heard of Freelance the Buccaneer?"

"Yes, often; we are in daily terror that he will swoop down upon our coast."

"He has done so; I am Freelance the Buccaneer, and whom men also call the Cavalier Corsair."

Judge Bernard Lysle turned an ashen hue and reeled in his saddle.

"No, no, Launcelot; it cannot be that you are that vile man."

"I speak the truth, and you are my prisoner, Judge Lysle."

"Help! help! for the love of God, help!"

The loud cry of the frightened man rung out clear and distinct upon the night air, and the bark of a dozen watch-dogs answered it; but over his mouth was pressed a hand of steel, another clutched his throat, and he was dragged from his saddle, while a kick sent the horse rushing homeward at full speed.

"Ah, my brave lads, you thought I was in danger. No, I have captured a man whom I wish you to bear at once to the boat," said Freelance, coolly, and the alarmed man was dragged away, while Freelance slowly followed.

Getting into the boat, the oarsmen seized their oars and pulled rapidly from the shore, and soon ran alongside the schooner, which immediately stood seaward.

"Senor Hernandez, rig a platform amidships and call the crew to witness an execution," was

the stern order of Freelance, as he stepped on deck, and he turned to Bernard Lysle, who groaned as he heard the command.

"Judge Lysle, the sentence of death which you would have meted out to me, I intend now to visit upon you."

"Mercy, Launcelot! For Heaven's sake have mercy upon me."

"Did you show mercy to me when you had me in your power? No! You desired me to be removed from your way, believing my mother would marry you were I dead, and that you would possess the property that was mine and my brother's."

"An appeal was made to you to postpone my sentence, and yet you refused it, and so delivered your charge to the jury that, as tools in your hands, they pronounced me guilty of being a very Cain, and that I escaped death was not your fault."

"What I am that act of yours made me, and revenge is sweet to me, and you shall die; you have but ten minutes to make your peace with God."

Turning away Freelance paced the deck, his face utterly merciless, and his eyes cast down, while the doomed man groveled in abject terror at the fate he so feared to face.

Near by stood the youth, Skip, his face very pale, and a look of pity in his eyes for the poor wretch; yet he dared not ask Freelance to spare him, for he well knew it would be utterly useless.

"All is ready, senor capitan," and Lieutenant Hernandez approached his chief.

"Bind that man's hands, and detail six seamen as executioners; he is to be shot."

The order was obeyed, and then the lieutenant called to Bernard Lysle to accompany him to the platform erected upon the lee bulwark.

"Oh, Launcelot, spare me! I sinned deeply in what I did to you, but be merciful and forgive me."

No answer came to the pleading tones, and the wretched man continued:

"Launcelot, I entreat you, by the love you bore your mother, and your father, to spare me! You have not ceased to have a heart, so do not let me die."

Even the wild, savage crew were moved by the pleading tones of the man, and Skip hid his face with his hands and ran into the cabin; but Freelance was deaf to the entreaty, and in a metallic voice he said:

"You plead in vain, Bernard Lysle; place him in position, Senor Hernandez."

The shrieking wretch was dragged away and placed upon the platform, in a kneeling posture, for his limbs refused to sustain his weight.

"Ready there, men!"

At the command of Freelance the six executioners raised their weapons and the doomed man broke out in a pitiful cry for mercy.

But it was useless; Freelance held no mercy in his heart.

"Aim! Fire!"

A wild shriek, a volley of musketry, and Bernard Lysle sunk in a heap upon the platform, then attempted to rise, and fell backward into the sea, to disappear forever beneath the dark waters, while the swift schooner rushed on, as though anxious to leave in her wake the spot where a human being had sunk from life into a grave far down beneath the waves.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED DENOUEMENT.

It was a dark, misty night, a few weeks after the visit of the buccaneer schooner to the Mississippi shores, and a fog like a heavy veil hung over the sea, shutting out wholly from view the lights of the city of Vera Cruz in the distance, and even the signal lanterns upon the battlements of the Castle San Juan de Uloa.

Upon the waters rode at anchor a small fishing-smack, her crew of three men busy with their nets, and little dreaming of any vessel near at hand, for they were not in the channel leading into the harbor.

But suddenly, out of the dense gloom appeared the shadowy outline of a large schooner, and above her decks towered a mass of snowy canvas, which brought to their lips a cry of alarm and warning to those upon the strange craft.

The sharp bows of the schooner swung quickly clear of the fishing-craft, just in time to prevent running her down, and as the vessel swept up into the wind and lay to, a stern voice ordered the fisherman to come alongside, an order which was promptly obeyed.

"The captain wishes to see you. Skip, show the man into the cabin," said Senor Hernandez, meeting the commander of the fishing-craft at the gangway.

"Si, senor; but you gave us a terrible fright," said the Mexican, following the youth who ushered him into the schooner's cabin, where Freelance sat at a table, above which hung a silver lamp.

Glancing up as the Mexican entered, he said: "My man, I have been nightly on the watch for some of you fishermen, and I have gold to pay for a service I wish you to render me."

You are willing to aid me if I am liberal with you, are you not?"

"Si, senor capitan."

"Your little craft sails in and out of the harbor unchallenged, I suppose?"

"No, senor; we are challenged by the guard-boats, but we are given the countersign when we come out to fish."

"Good! and you can run in and out of the harbor at your will?"

"Si, senor capitan."

"How many men have you on your craft with you?"

"My two sons only, senor."

"Very good; you will let them come on board my schooner and await your return here, while you run me up to Vera Cruz, for which service I will give you a hundred pesos."

"Oh, senor!" cried the delighted man.

"But listen: I go on secret business, and I wish no one to know that I am in town, and I will wear a storm suit like your own. If you betray my presence to any one you will never see your sons again, but serve me well and I will give you another hundred pesos."

"I will serve you faithfully, senor capitan but you will not harm my poor boys?"

"Not unless you intend harm to me. Go and get your craft ready, and I will soon join you."

The fisherman left the cabin, and a few moments after Freelance came on deck, dressed in a boatman's suit, and wearing a false beard.

"Senor, please let me accompany you, I beg of you."

Freelance turned, and at his side stood the youth.

Having become attached to the boy, Freelance said, kindly:

"Rig yourself out in a coarse suit and come along."

The youth gladly obeyed, and soon after the old fisherman, with his two passengers, was heading through the gloom toward Vera Cruz, while the schooner took easy tacks under shortened sail.

Challenged by the guard-boats the Mexican fisherman replied with the watchword for the night, and said he was returning for his nets, and in safety the little craft reached the docks, where Freelance and Skip sprung ashore.

"Await me here, my man. I will be gone perhaps an hour, and it may be longer; but remember, you do not speak of my coming, or a schooner in the offing!"

"I remember, senor; I love my boys too well to get them into trouble."

"And gold, too, I guess. Come, Skip."

Up the dark street the two went, and as they turned into one of the principal thoroughfares, Freelance said, absently:

"It is a sad duty I came here to perform, and my heart aches to have to tell poor Delbanco I can learn nothing of his daughter's fate; but I must not shrink from it, painful though it be."

Skip made no reply, for he knew it was a habit of Freelance to frequently speak aloud to himself, and a few moments' longer walk brought them to the Jew's house.

It was not yet midnight, and Delbanco, who had not retired, answered the knock promptly.

"It is too late, senor, for purchases," he said abruptly, as his eyes fell upon the supposed fisherman.

"But not to welcome a friend, Senor Delbanco," said Freelance, stepping across the threshold.

"The Senor—"

"Hold! do not breathe that name here, Jew, for Mexican walls are filled with ears. Come in, Skip."

"And my daughter—my beautiful Juanita, senor; you did not bring her?" said Delbanco, as he led the way into the *salon*.

"My poor Delbanco, I will tell you all," and Freelance made known his visit to the island of Ricardo, and the result.

"The few captives I found there I sent on to New Orleans by a merchant vessel, excepting a poor nun, who was killed by a shot from an American brig that chased me, and this youth, who says he never saw a person answering your daughter's description, in the power of Ricardo; but have you learned nothing yourself regarding her?"

"No, no, senor; those who went out on the Sea Gull have not yet returned, and I am heartbroken; my life has no value now, for the brightness of existence has gone from me," and the Jew bowed in bitter grief.

"Father!"

"Hark! My daughter's voice! She calls me, and Delbanco staggered to his feet.

"Father, it was I that called you. See, I am your Juanita."

The youth suddenly confronted him, and throwing aside the false mustache, *Juanita Delbanco was revealed!*

CHAPTER XXIX.

A BITTER BLOW.

In an ecstasy of joy, at the startling discovery of his dearly beloved daughter in the supposed youth Skip, the old Jew pressed her again and

again to his heart, while Freelance, also taken wholly aback, stood looking on in unfeigned surprise.

"Oh, senor, you have then only been trying to make my joy greater, by first deceiving me," cried Delbanco, "and have indeed brought my child back to my heart."

"Senor Delbanco, I have brought your child back, yes; but I pledge you my honor, up to this moment I believed her a boy, and she has most cleverly deceived me, and all on board the schooner."

"Forgive me, senor, for the deception and for all I found out while in my disguise as your cabin boy Skip; but I will explain how it was that I assumed the disguise that has certainly served me well."

"When I sailed for New Orleans I carried with me several disguises, not knowing what might happen to cause me to use them, and determined, if overtaken by free rovers, not to appear in my true character."

"When our captain said it was Ricardo the pirate, chasing us, I got the stewardess to cut off my long hair, and dressing in these clothes, with the aid of a false mustache appeared as a youth of eighteen, and such all believed me, for I even escaped your searching eyes, and Ricardo believed he told the truth when he said there was no maiden answering my description captured on board the Sea Gull."

"Consequently I was treated as one of the male passengers, and not subjected to the insults that would have been heaped upon me had they known me to be a woman."

"You acted with wonderful presence of mind, senorita, and did perfectly right," remarked Freelance, gazing with admiration upon her, as she continued:

"To protect my good name I kept up my masquerade after we were taken to the Pirate Island, and to you, Senor Freelance, I owe it that I am again restored to my father's arms. Am I forgiven the deception, senor?" and Juanita took the hand of Freelance and gazed up into his face.

"I use too many disguises myself, and have found them too useful, to feel hurt when others deceive me in the same way. You are more than forgiven, senorita," and Freelance spoke meaningly, as he had not forgotten another masquerading freak of Juanita's, that had saved his life.

Almost stunned by all he heard, it was some time before Delbanco could speak; but at length he found his tongue and made his daughter tell him over and over again of her adventures, after which the three sat down to a sumptuous repast.

After quite a long stay, Freelance took his leave of the kind Jew and his daughter, and as he held the small hand of Juanita in his own, he felt it tremble, while her eyes filled with tears, for she had learned to madly love the strange, handsome man, buccaneer though he was.

Leaving the Jew's house, Freelance walked rapidly along, and soon came to the home of the Mexican woman, where dwelt the only being that held him to life—his boy.

He knocked upon the door, and it yielded to his touch.

He entered, and all was dark within.

Then a low moan came to his ears, and he quickly drew a small dark lantern from his pocket.

What a sight then met his gaze—a sight that made him reel like a drunken man, and a cry of anguish burst from his lips.

Upon the floor in front of him was Allene, the nurse, and she was dead.

A wound was upon her temple, and her pulse was forever stilled.

By the door, prone upon her back, lay the old Mexican woman, gasping and dying.

Instantly he knelt beside her, and by the light of the lantern she recognized him in spite of his disguise.

"Too late, senor—too late! He is gone," she murmured.

"Gone! My boy! is he dead, woman?"

"No, oh, no; some old enemy of yours—one you once severely punished on your vessel, has dogged your steps, and sought your boy. We fought for him, but it was of no avail—he has gone."

"And where?"

The voice was startlingly distinct, and the eyes were lurid; but the face was now perfectly calm.

"He was a seaman, senor; he carried the noble little fellow with him."

"Then upon the seas will I look for him, and woe betide the man that has done me this wrong."

Rising to his feet he strode from the room and the house, wholly forgetful of the dying woman.

With rapid step he retraced his way to the home of the Jew, and there Delbanco and Juanita heard the strange story of his marriage to a Persian, her death, and of the little boy.

"Here, Jew, here are jewels worth a king's ransom," and Freelance threw a handful of precious stones upon the table.

"Take those, and let gold go out like water, but what you find trace of my boy; I will look for him upon the sea."

"Find him, Delbanco, and I will make your daughter the wealthiest maiden in Mexico."

"The dying woman and the dead nurse, poor Allene, lie in the cabin—see to them. Farewell."

He turned abruptly and left the house, and a quarter of an hour later the fisherman's boat was flying seaward, Freelance silent, stern, sorrowing, crouched down in the cockpit.

A rapid run and the little craft sighted the schooner, and was soon alongside.

"Your name?" he said, abruptly, as he sprung on deck.

"Pedro Ramez, senor captain."

"Then when you receive word from me, come with your craft to the place I designate, and I will enrich you. Here is gold for you."

He tossed him a purse, containing more than he had promised, and, as the fishing-boat swung loose, the buccaneer schooner headed out into the open Gulf.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WAIF OF THE WAVE.

ADRIFT upon the ocean—a waif upon the waters—an oarless boat tossed about by the waves, and within, a hideous crew—for four were dead, and one seemed hardly alive, and his haggard face, as the bright moonlight fell upon it, told of his sufferings.

But succor is at hand, for, over the moonlit waters, comes a large schooner, her sails spread to catch the light breeze, and her sharp prow cutting the waves without a ripple.

Groups of men, in uniform, are upon the decks, the guns are run out of the black ports, ready for action, and the craft has a weird, wild look.

"A boat adrift ahead, senor," calls out the man in the foretop.

"Ay, ay; steer for it, helmsman," was the quiet answer, and the officer continued his steady walk from starboard to port.

Luffing up a few points as it passed the boat, the men of the schooner seized the little craft, and then almost let it go, with cries of horror, as their eyes fell upon the hideous freight it carried.

"There are four dead men and one alive in the boat, senor," reported a sailor.

"Throw the dead overboard, and carry the living one into my cabin," was the order, and it was promptly obeyed, the dead bodies dashing up the spray in silvery showers as they struck the water.

"He is in a bad way, senor, but a likely lad," reported a sailor who had aided in bearing the survivor into the cabin.

With an effort the officer seemed to arouse himself from his deep reverie, and entered the cabin, where a slender, emaciated form lay upon a lounge, the eyes wide open and staring, the face flushed with fever, and the lips muttering in delirium.

"Poor boy!" and the officer bent over him, and the light falling full upon his face displayed the dark, stern visage of Freelance the Freebooter, grown more severe, harder, and with the hair and mustache turned to iron-gray in the ten years that have passed since the reader last beheld him, the night he discovered that his little son had been taken from him.

And in those ten years the name of Freelance had become known far and wide as the most daring freebooter afloat, for, seeming to bear a charmed life, he had escaped every cruiser sent in pursuit of him, and, though his island rendezvous had been attacked and destroyed, his other vessels captured, he eluded all pursuit, and made his name a terror upon the land and seas.

As he bent over the youth, a word that passed the parched lips came to his ears.

"God in Heaven! What name was that he spoke?" he cried, springing back as though an adder had struck at him.

Again the lips parted:

"Allene! Allene!"

Instantly the boy's woolen shirt was torn open, and there above the heart, tattooed into the white flesh, was a blood-red anchor!

"Oh, Heaven, I thank Thee! my boy! my boy! I have found my boy," and bending over the emaciated form the strong man, whose name all men feared, whose deeds of crime were untold, and who defied death, sobbed as though his very heart was torn asunder.

At length he grew more calm, and gazed lovingly into the haggard face, his own scarcely less so.

"Merle, my noble son, after ten long years I have found you—you, whom I believed, like all others I had loved, forever lost to me."

"Yes, there over your heart is the red anchor, the emblem of your mother's race, which I tattooed on you, long years ago in Vera Cruz."

"Ah, how my heart is stirred with joy this night; but I forget that you are weak and suffering, and your brow burns with fever; but you shall not die—no, I will not let you die," and Freelance, from that night, hung over the bedside of his son, until he saw that all danger was passed and that the boy would live.

"Yes, he will live," he cried, joyously—"live to gladden my heart."

But his brow at once clouded again.

"Bah! my heart can know no joy, for I dare

not tell him that I am his father—that he owes his being to Freelance the Buccaneer."

"No, I will not tell him, and yet I will write for him a confession of my life and tell him what a toy Fate has made of me—what a waif of the wave I have been, drifting like an oarless boat upon a tempest-tossed sea."

"Then, if harm befalls me—and sooner or later it must come—he will know who and what he is, and I will enrich him beyond all men, for I will tell him how to find the Treasure Isle, which I left that faithful slave to guard, years ago, and which I have never had the heart to visit since."

"Ah, but my boy will be a prince in riches, when he receives the inheritance of his mother, now hidden on the Treasure Isle, and the wealth I leave him, and which has cost rivers of blood. Bah! all gold is blood-stained, and every gem we wear has graced fingers that are now but bones."

He turned away from his bitter contemplations, and approached the lounge upon which his son lay, wonderfully improved in the two weeks he had been on the schooner.

"Well, my young friend, you will soon be yourself again," he said, cheerily, gazing earnestly upon the youth, who in face and form was strangely like his father.

"Yes, senor, thanks to your kind care; but is this an American vessel of war?"

"No, it is a Cosmopolitan craft—sailing under every flag that floats, but fighting under but one," recklessly answered Freelance.

"And that flag is—"

"One as black as the hearts of the men who uphold it," savagely replied the chief.

"Senor! can it be that this is a buccaneer?" cried the youth in surprise.

"It is; I am Freelance the Buccaneer."

The boy started and gazed curiously upon the man before him, and then there was admiration in his look, as he said:

"The name is well known, senor, and yet, after my kind treatment by you, I do not wonder that you bear another name."

"And what is that, pray?"

"The Cavalier Corsair; for it is said you never harm a woman or a child, and war only against men."

"That is about the only truth ever told of me. I am no monster in human shape, boy; but, tell me, how was it I found you at sea in an open boat, with four dead companions?" asked Freelance, as though anxious to change the subject of conversation.

"I was second mate of an English vessel, sir, trading in the Indies, and we were wrecked in a hurricane and had to take to our boats without food or water, and my companions died from starvation and suffering."

"You have a strong constitution to outlive men like them, and you are very young to have been mate of a vessel."

"I am as hardy as a pine tree, senor, and I have picked up knowledge about the sea until I am a good sailor," modestly answered the boy.

"And your parents, where are they?"

"I have no parents, senor. Long years ago I remember having a home, and some terrible scene, what I cannot recall, is connected with it; but I have been, ever since a wee boy, a sailor, knocked about the world and drifting from ship to snip until I have no nationality, or flag."

"Then you shall remain with me, boy, and I will be as a father to you. Do not say me nay, but promise to remain," and Freelance spoke pleadingly.

Impressed by his strange, earnest manner, and thankful to him for what he had done for him, the youth, who had said his name was Merle, answered:

"While I am with you, senor, I will serve you all I can; but I beg of you to let me leave the schooner when good opportunity offers, for I look to a higher aim in life—forgive me if I hurt you—than being a pirate."

"By Heaven! boy, your aim in life shall rise above a pirate deck, and, ere very long I will go with you from the mad scenes my life has known in the bitter past—I will go with you to a far-away home, where new associations will cause me to forget the past and live for the future."

"But, Merle, until I haul down the black flag from above my head, I wish you to remain with me, and I will make you one of my officers."

And Freelance was as true as his word, for in spite of the dark brows of his angry crew, and frowning glances of his other officers, he made Merle a lieutenant on board the Buccaneer craft.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE STROKE FALLS AT LAST.

SIX months have passed away since the Waif of the Wave, picked up in an open boat at sea, was discovered by the Cavalier Corsair to be his own son, his little Merle, for whom he had searched so long without success, after the fatal night when he had visited Vera Cruz to find him taken from him.

Often had he communicated with Delbanco, the Jew, who, with his beautiful daughter,

spared no trouble or gold to search for the missing boy; but ever came back the same dread answer:

"No tidings of the child."

At last Fate had drifted him in the path of his father's vessel, and the two were united once more, though Merle knew not the tie that bound them, yet seemed strangely drawn toward the dark, stern corsair chief.

In the six months that had elapsed since Merle had been an officer on board the schooner, he had proven himself a thorough seaman; but still he was not popular, either with his brother officers or his men, for they hated the idea of a mere boy being placed over them.

Freelance knew well their feelings, yet it made no difference to him, other than to cause him to rule them more severely, and wholly disregard their mutterings.

But the storm was gathering, and the end must come that would fall heavily upon the iron hand that had so long ruled that wild and savage horde.

Buccaneering was yearly becoming more dangerous, prizes were less frequently found easy prey, and when taken were of far less value than the richly-freighted ships that had coasted the Spanish main, and cruisers of all nations were making a common war upon piracy, until the name of Freelance alone held his crew together.

Following the course of the swift vessel, the reader beholds her again heading in toward the Mississippi shore, just before sunset of a pleasant day, six months after the coming on board of Merle, the Waif.

Standing on the quarter-deck was Freelance, and near him his son, dressed in a handsome uniform.

"You know the channel in here, sir?" asked the youth.

"Yes, well; I was born in yonder handsome plantation home you see nestling amid that group of trees," and Freelance pointed to a villa two leagues away, and which the youth gazed upon with feelings of deepest interest as the home of the chief, while to his mind came the question of what had driven that splendid man to piracy.

"It is to visit that home I have come here, boy; though, with several cruisers in close vicinity, it is a dangerous thing to do; yet I feel a pressure here," and he laid his hand upon his heart; "a presentiment that ere long death will clutch me in his arms, and I longed to once more visit the scenes of my boyhood."

"Then, in that long ago, Merle, I was happy, and no storm-clouds had risen above the horizon of my young life; now how changed, for darkness and despair ever hover over me."

"And are your parents still living then?" asked Merle, with interest.

"Alas! no; my father fell in a duel when I was a boy—a vendetta that cost many noble lives; my poor mother died of a broken heart—she believed me guilty of slaying my brother; the homestead now belongs to my brother, who is an officer in the navy, and he lives there when on leave."

"No welcome will I have there now, and it is pollution for my feet to tread the paths I trod in innocent childhood; but I must go and see the old place once more."

"And then you will sail for the Indies and give up your life of piracy, as you promised me?"

"Yes, Merle; I will henceforth lead a different life. Now bring the schooner to anchor, and call the gig alongside for me. I will need no boat's crew, for I will row myself."

Ten minutes after the schooner lay at anchor, and the chief was rowing shoreward, while darkness was creeping upon the sea and hiding the land from view.

But seaward the light of the setting sun yet lingered, and the large hull and towering masts of a frigate suddenly came in sight around a point of land.

"Ho there! spring into a boat and recall the chief!" ordered Merle, quickly, and as a cutter dashed away in pursuit of Freelance, Merle called the crew to their guns, and excepting raising the anchor and setting sail, had all in readiness for combat.

In the meantime the frigate lay in the only pass leading seaward, and the darkness hid her from view; but that she had come there to blockade the schooner was evident.

Shortly after the cutter returned and said the chief would rejoin his vessel within the hour, and for the schooner to be prepared against an attack of small boats from the frigate.

Then a silence like death rested upon the waters; but keen eyes peered out into the darkness to watch for coming danger.

And soon it came, for a long line of boats, crowded with men and with muffled oars, approached the schooner, hoping to surprise the buccaneers.

But the men held their lives in their hands on that little outlaw craft, and poured upon their enemies a galling fire that sent many a soul aloft, and the fierce combat was begun.

With undaunted front the assailants pressed on, to be hurled back into the sea, and the mad carnage went on until the boats were driven off,

just as trailing storm-clouds swept over the sea and the wind lashed the waters into foam.

Then, out of the gloom dashed a boat with but one occupant, and running alongside the schooner a tall form sprang upon the deck.

"Up with that anchor! All hands to set sail!"

The stern order was in the deep tones of the chief, and in an instant almost the schooner was dashing through the waves, rushing by the returning boats, and heading for the frigate, which had dropped anchor, and was lying under the lee of a small island to ride out the storm.

But a flash of vivid lightning discovered the flying schooner to the eyes on board the frigate, and a moment after there came a hail as the fleet craft rushed by.

In loud tones Freelance replied, as though he were the officer in charge of the attacking party, and had taken the schooner, and held on his course; but the returning boats were now near the man-of-war and the deception was made known.

Instantly the guns of the frigate thundered savagely forth, and sent an iron hail after the flying buccaneer, hitting her in a number of places, and laying several of her crew upon the deck torn and dying.

But Freelance had run many a deadly gantlet before and held on seaward, passed through the island chain, and plunged into the storm-swept waters of the Gulf, while his huge enemy, under close-reefed sails, at once stood out of the inlet in hot pursuit of the daring Cavalier Corsair.

Out into the midnight gloom, ever and anon set ablaze by lurid lightning, rushed the schooner, while upon her decks her demon-like crew are struggling for mastery, having mutinied against their chief.

But suddenly a crash of thunder shakes the very sea, a lurid blaze of lightning bursts from an inky cloud, and descends upon the tall topmast of the buccaneer schooner, and darkness, death, wreck and ruin follow.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE WRECK.

THE scene has changed; the storm-clouds have drifted away and the sky is clear, though the wind yet blows free, and the waves run high.

And the buccaneer schooner?

The end has come, for the once beautiful craft, that so long bounded in triumph over the seas, whose keel left a red wake wherever its sharp bows cut the blue waters, is a wreck upon the waves, her hull torn by shot, her mainmast shivered into splinters by the lightning's stroke, and the foremast broken off until only a stump remains.

The bulwarks are shattered, the deck torn in many places, the guns broken loose from their lashings, and some of them lost overboard.

But one living being is visible upon her deck, and he crouches down under the shelter of the fore-castle pivot-gun, which alone remains firm.

And that one is a mere boy, yet one who held an officer's rank on board the schooner. It is Merle, the son of Freelance the Cavalier Corsair.

Within the cabin a wild scene presents itself, for dead and dying men fill the floor, and lying in their midst, his right hand grasping his blood-stained cutlass, his left clutching the throat of a burly mutineer with iron grasp, is Freelance the Cavalier Corsair, whose face is terrible in death, for at last the mighty Destroyer has overtaken him, and retribution has come upon him for his deeds.

Half a mile away upon the waters, her guns commanding the wreck, lies a stately frigate, carrying the Stars and Stripes at her peak, while moving rapidly over the rough waters are several boats filled with men.

At last the leading boat strikes the wreck, and an officer springs on board, cutlass in hand, and with his men at his back.

His eye falls upon the youth crouching in the fore-castle, and from him he learns of the red carnival of carnage that had reigned on board the schooner, since the attack of the frigate's boats the night before.

Leading the way to the cabin the youth points within.

The eye of the frigate's officer falls upon the tall form, and dark, stern face of the pirate chief, and he starts back with a cry of horror.

"Great God! That Freelance the Buccaneer?" he cried, hoarsely.

"Yes, senior, that man is he whom men call Freelance the Cavalier Corsair," said the youth, sadly.

"Boy, that man is Launcelot Grenville, my brother!"

With quivering lip and tear-dimmed eye Arthur Grenville knelt beside the man he had long believed dead—the brother he had so dearly loved, and had now found to mourn as a buccaneer chieftain—a very curse upon the sea.

CONCLUSION.

KIND reader, would you know of the career of Merle, the son of Freelance the Cavalier Corsair, I refer you to the columns of the STAR JOURNAL for the story of "Merle the Mutineer;" but, as you have followed me through this romance of the sea, and doubtless become in-

terested in the characters that figure herein, I will tell you that Juanita Delbanco, the beautiful Jewess, held but one love through life, and though sought by hundreds for her wealth and beauty, died an old maid, leaving all the property she had inherited from her father to the poor of her own race.

Alvez Miguel, like his chief, died on a pirate deck, and with him disappeared the Buccaneer flag in the waters of the gulf.

And Maud, who became the Amazerg Queen, never regretted her marriage with the Red Rais, and from them descended the present ruler of the mountain tribe of Amazergo.

Launcelot Grenville, the toy of a cruel Fate, sleeps at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, having branded his brow with crime, and left behind him, written in letters of blood, the hated name of Freelance the Buccaneer.

THE END.

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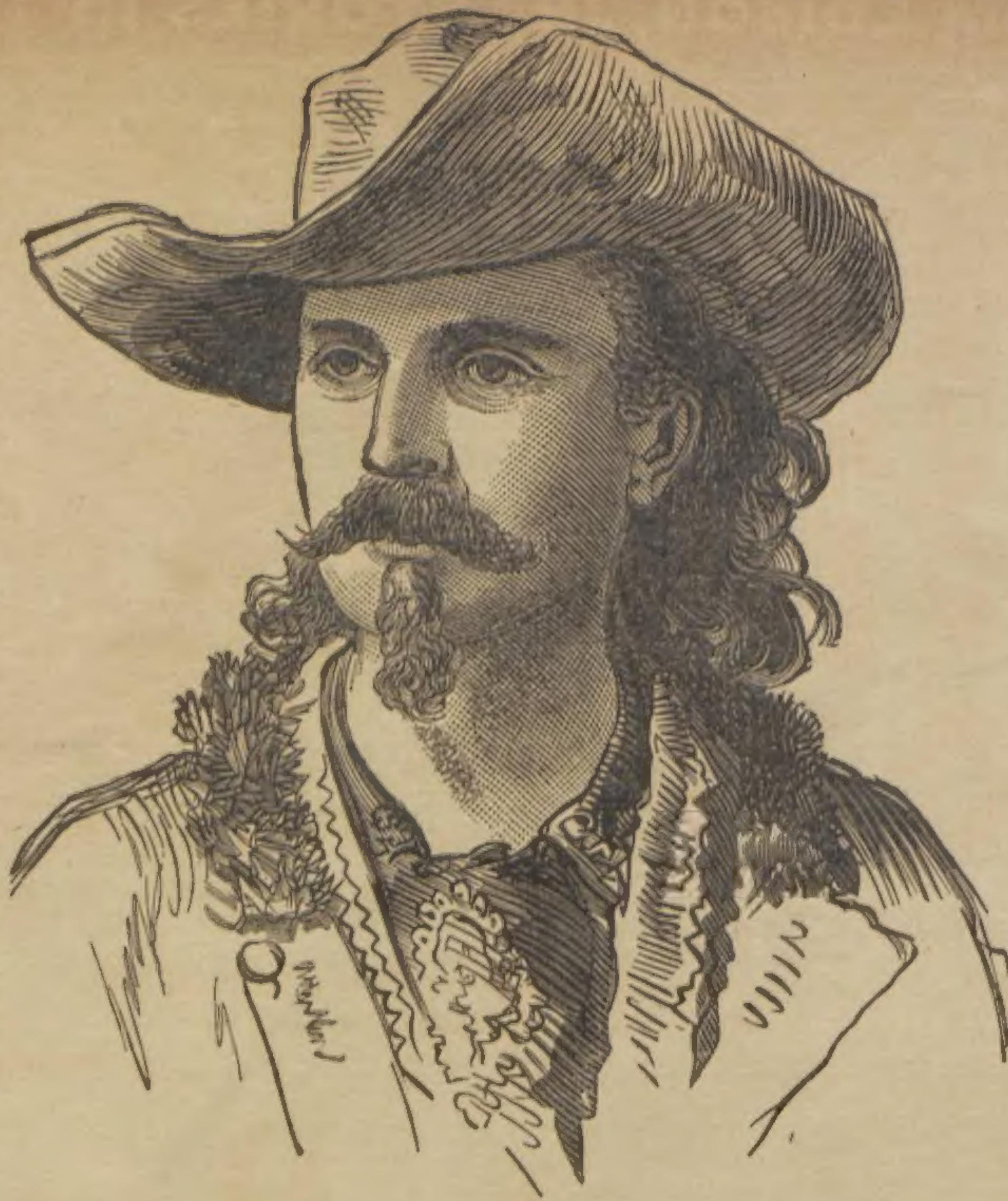
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